Action Stories of Every Variety

ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

NOV. 2

10¢ Canada 15¢

The Snow Girl

By Ray Cummings

The Dark Brotherhoo

A Powerful Novelette

By William Corcoran

Newest Styles
Dignified Credit at Saving Prices

10 DAYS' FREE TRIAL

12 Months to Pay

$50.00

DT1-Newest Butterfly design, of 18K Solid White Gold engagement ring set with sparkling, genuine blue-white diamond. $4.08 a mo.

$29.50

DT28-Gorgeously hand engraved 18K Solid White Gold "Bridal Blossom" wedding ring; 5 fiery genuine blue-white diamonds. $2.37 a mo.

$42.50

DT27-The "Bridal Blossom"—Hand pierced lace design engagement ring of 18K Solid White Gold, genuine blue-white diamond of rare brilliance. $3.46 a mo.

$48.50

DT12-Dazzling cluster of 7 perfectly matched genuine blue white diamonds; hand pierced 18K Solid White Gold lady's mounting. Looks like $750 solitaire. $3.96 a mo.

$42.50

$75

DT23-Modern, square-prong, engagement ring in new "step" design 18K Solid White Gold set with specially selected dazzling, genuine blue-white diamond. $6.16 a month.

$50

DT7-New, massive, gentleman's ring of 14K Solid Green Gold and 18K Solid White Gold top; with a flashing, genuine blue-white diamond. $4.08 a month.

$29.50

DT26-Latest style, modernistic effect 18K Solid White Gold lady's ring; fiery genuine blue-white diamond. $2.37 a month.

DT10-Gorgeous lace design hand pierced 18K Solid White Gold dinner ring; 3 fiery, genuine, blue-white diamonds; 2 French-blue sapphires. $3.46 a mo.

No Red Tape
No Delay

Send $1 for Balance **12 MONTHS TO PAY**

$27.50

DT 31-Nationally known **ELGIN** or **WALTHAM!** Handsomely engraved new style case. Guaranteed Elgin or Waltham movement. **Warranted 14K White or Green Gold filled 25-year case.** Latest style flexible mesh wrist band to match. $2.21 a mo.

$37.50

DT8-Diamond wrist watch. 14K Solid White Gold engraved case; **2 genuine diamonds, 8 emeralds or sapphires.** Guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Pierced flexible bracelet with sapphires or emeralds to match. $3.04 a month.

Guaranteed Savings

Direct Diamond Importations and large volume buying for both our National Mail Order business and our Chain Store system enable us to offer you superior quality genuine diamonds, fine standard watches and exquisite jewelry at saving prices which are beyond comparison. All of this with no extra charge for the added convenience and advantage of dignified, liberal credit.

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Just send **$1.00** with your order and your selection comes to you on **10 Days' Free Trial. No C.O.D. to pay on arrival.** After full examination and free trial, pay balance in 12 equal monthly payments.

Satisfaction Guaranteed
10 Days' Free Trial

You have the full privilege of 10 days' free trial—if not completely satisfied return shipment at our expense and the entire deposit will be refunded. Written guarantee bond with every purchase.

All Dealings Strictly Confidential

A whole year to pay! No extra charge—no red tape. **You take no risk**—satisfaction absolutely guaranteed or money back.

Gift Cases Free

Every article comes to you in a most beautiful and appropriate presentation case.

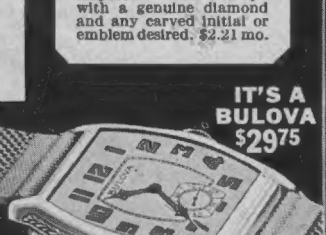
$27.50

DT22-Gentleman's massive, hand engraved ring of 14K Solid White Gold Imported black Onyx with a genuine diamond and any carved initial or emblem desired. $2.21 mo.

$24.50

DT9-The "Princess Pat"—14K Solid White Gold engraved case, guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Engraved genuine "Wristacrat" flexible bracelet to match. $1.96 a month.

IT'S A BULOVA $29.75



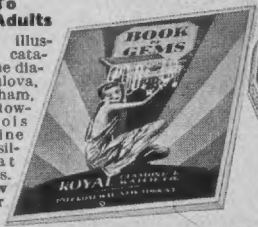
DT5-Nationally advertised guaranteed 15-jewel Gent's BULOVA watch. White Gold filled case, "dust-tite" protector; radium dial and hands; latest style woven wrist band to match. $2.39 a mo.

CASH PRICES AT CREDIT TERMS

Send for this **CATALOGUE!**

FREE To Adults

Completely illustrated new catalog of genuine diamonds; Bulova, Elgin, Waltham, Hamilton, Howard, Illinois watches; fine jewelry and silverware at special prices. **Write now to get your Free Copy.**



$27.50

DT19-Nationally known 15-jewel **WALTHAM** movement; **20-year** warranted engraved White Gold filled, 12 size, thin model decagon case. Tested and regulated. White Gold filled knife, fine Waldemar chain. All complete in handsome gift case. $2.21 a mo.

ESTABLISHED 1895

ROYAL DIAMOND AND WATCH CO.

Address Dept. 42-Y, 170 Broadway, New York

1 inch to your biceps 2 inches to your chest *in* 7½ *hours*

A marvelous system of muscular education that transforms weaklings into strong men almost overnight. . . .

This is *not* a fish story. It's a fact! When I say I can add one whole inch of real live muscle to each of your arms and two whole inches of the same wonderful strength across your chest, in just 7½ hours, I mean just that.

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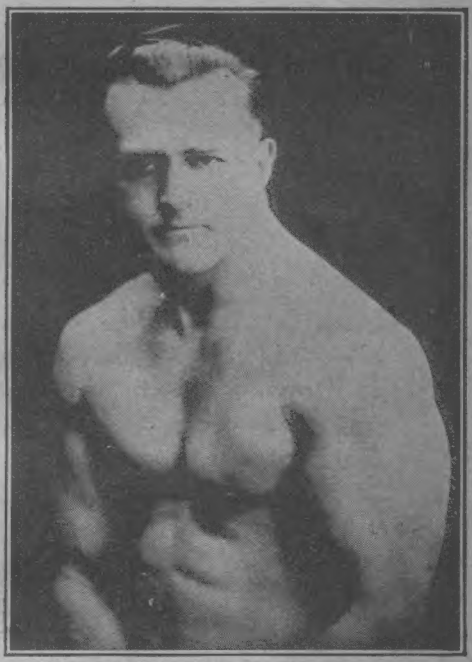

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Author of "Muscle Building," "Science of Wrestling," "Secrets of Strength," "Here's Health," "Endurance," etc.

Here's How I Do It!

All I ask of you is 7½ hours of your spare time, divided into 15 minute periods for 30 consecutive days. In those 15 minute periods you are to do exactly as I advise, using the apparatus I send you. At the end of the 7½ hours step before your mirror, and marvel at the transformation.

Could that great, handsome figure be yours? Those huge broad shoulders—that immense barrel-like chest with its powerful lungs—those tremendous arms and wrists, ready to crush everything before them—could it be possible?

Yours it can be—and quickly, too. But first send for my new 64-page book. Let me show you how such a body can be yours without risking a single penny. How my ironclad guarantee absolutely protects every single pupil. Send for it today. Get going to new health—new happiness—new joys *now!*

Send For My New 64 Page Book "Muscular Development"

IT IS FREE

Do you get that? It's free. I don't ask a cent. It's yours with my compliments. Take it and read it. It's the peppiest piece of literature you ever flashed your eyes on. And 48 full-page photos of myself and some of my numerous prize-winning pupils. This is the finest collection of strong men ever assembled into one book—look them over—doctors, lawyers, merchants, mechanics and every line of trade you can think of. I swear you'll never let this book get out of your hands again. And just think—you're getting it for nothing. Don't hesitate—no strings attached to it. Grab it.

Take your pen or pencil and fill out the coupon, or even your name and address on a postal will do—do it now before you turn this page.

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Dept. 1111, 305 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir:—Please send me absolutely free and without any obligation on my part whatsoever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development." (Please write or print plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

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Be A *RADIO* Expert

Seldom Under $100 a Week

"My earnings in Radio are many times greater than I ever anticipated they would be when I enrolled. They seldom fall under $100 a week. My profits for the past three months were $577, $645, $465. If your course cost 4 or 5 times more I would still consider it a good investment. You give a man more for his money than anybody else."

E. E. WINBORNE,
1414 W. 48th St., Norfolk, Va.

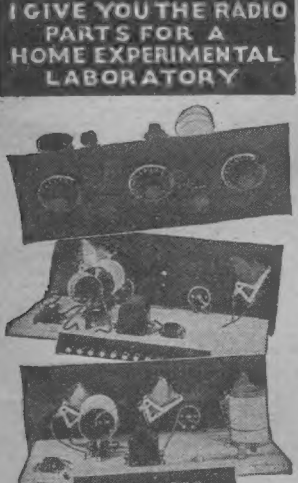
Making $400 a Month

"I really believe that every man should take your course in Radio. If he has anything in him at all there is every chance for him to get some place. The field hasn't been scratched and it is getting bigger and better every day. A man just can't go wrong. I was making good money but could see the opportunities in Radio. Believe me, I am not sorry, as I have made more money than ever before. I have made more than $400 each month."

J. G. DAHLSTEAD,
1484 So. 15th St., Salt Lake City, Utah.

Many make $50 to $200 a week

I GIVE YOU THE RADIO PARTS FOR A HOME EXPERIMENTAL LABORATORY



WITH THEM YOU CAN BUILD 100 CIRCUITS. 4 YOU BUILD ARE SHOWN HERE MY BOOK EXPLAINS THIS PRACTICAL, FASCINATING WAY OF LEARNING RADIO AT HOME

This is Radio's Biggest Year

Don't slave your life away for $25, $35 and $40 a week in a no-future job. You're foolish to be satisfied with less than $50, $60 or $75 a week for more than the short time it takes to get ready for Radio. That is what the good Radio jobs pay. And $50 to $75 a week is only the beginning. Many lead to as high as $200 to $250 a week.

Big Growth Making Hundreds of Fine Jobs Yearly

Over 300,000 jobs have already been made by Radio's amazing growth. It continues to grow and expand fast. This big growth can put you ahead fast. I have doubled and tripled salaries. I have shown hundreds how to make much more money in Radio than they were making in other fields. Let me show you what I can do for you.

Many Make $5 to $25 Extra A Week Almost at Once

The day you start I will show you how to do 10 Radio jobs most common in every neighborhood so you can begin making extra money. Frank Golden, 329 Walnut St., Newark, N. J., says, "I made over $900 in my spare time in about 10 months." This is the world-famous course that pays for itself.

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FREE Book Tells What Radio Offers You

"Rich Rewards in Radio" gives you the facts about Radio, what your prospects are for the future, how you can get in without delay, what you can make. It explains our lifetime Employment Service after graduation and many other fine features. Get a copy AT ONCE.

J. E. SMITH, Pres.,
Dept. 9YK
National Radio Institute
Washington, D.C.

J. E. SMITH

Jumps From $35 to $100 a Week

"It is certainly great sport to do Radio work and a profitable one too. I had the pleasure of earning $110 last week servicing and selling sets. I have made as high as $241 in two weeks. Before I entered Radio I was making $35 a week. You started me off on the right foot by giving me the knowledge every man should have to succeed in Radio."

J. A. VAUGHN,
4202 Arsenal St., St. Louis, Mo.

Mail this Coupon at Once

J. E. Smith, President,
National Radio Institute,
Dept. 9YK
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," your book on Radio's opportunities for big success.

Name _____

Address _____ Age _____

City _____ State _____

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

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Dec. 7th Classified Forms Close Nov. 12th.

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AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

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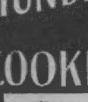
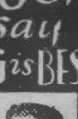


$350 a Month Now

"Am now getting $350 a month and traveling expenses, thanks to your Course."

Chas. L. Burnside, Belle Fourche, S. Dak.



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"Am now making $11 a day in Electricity. Four pay boosts for me since enrolling."

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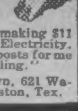

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"$90 a week is my pay now. Not bad for a 20 year old boy. Earned $15 a week when I enrolled."

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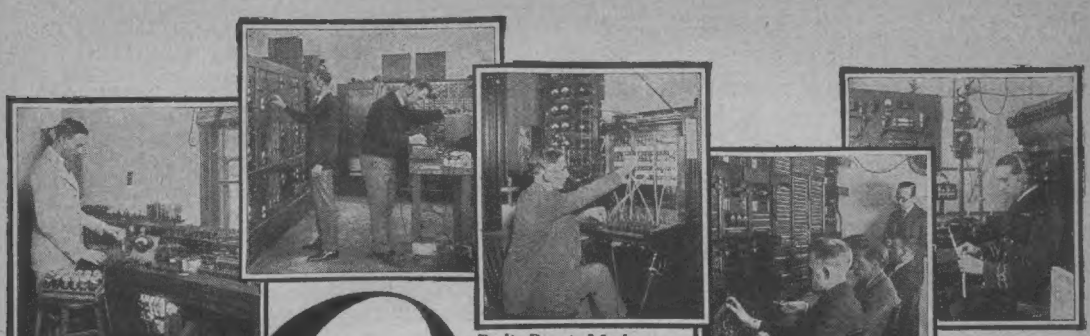

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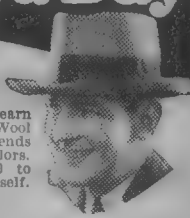

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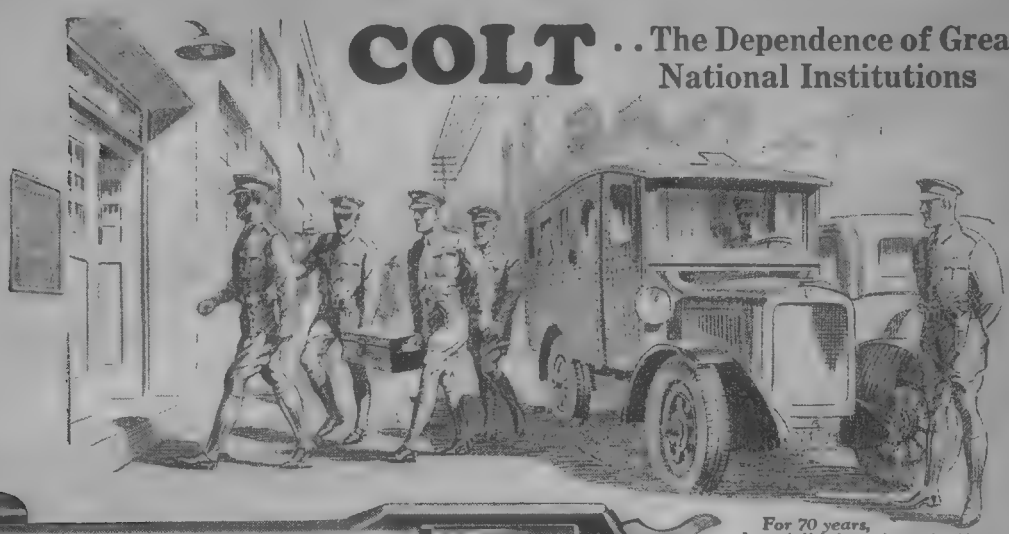

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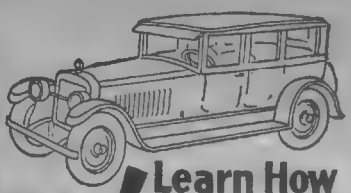

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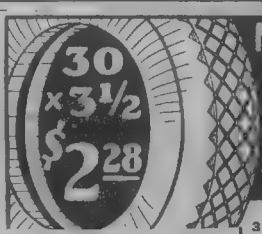

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34x4½-2	3.50	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.75
33x5	3.65	1.75
29x4.40	2.35	1.10
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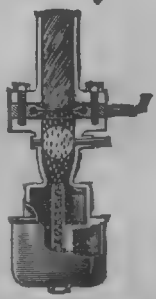

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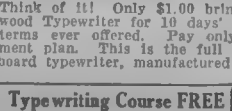

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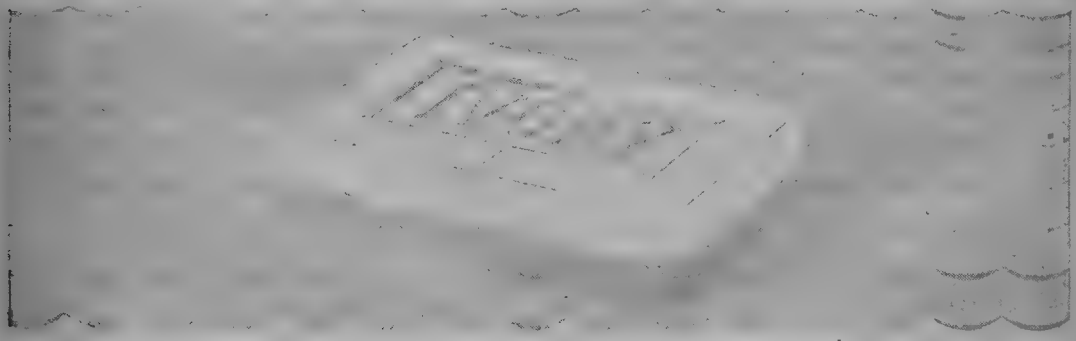


ARGOSY
ISSUED WEEKLY

VOLUME 207 SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1929 NUMBER 5

A cluster of strange white shapes swarmed over his struggling figure

The Snow Girl

Last of the unexplored continents, snow-bound Antarctica held strange mysteries for the intrepid men who braved its blizzards, the South Pole flyers Welch and Dragon

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "Princess of the Atom," "The Shadow Girl," etc.

"Frozen beauty, untouched by warming sun:
Maiden carved in marble. Is she to be wooed?
Is she to be won?"

CHAPTER I.

THE BLIZZARD FROM THE POLE.

THE blizzard swept down from the Pole on the night of July 3. It began in early evening, wholly without warning. We had had a clear, purple sky, star strewn. White, cold and brilliant were the stars as seen from this ten-thousand-foot altitude beyond the Great Ice Barrier. There was no wind. The temperature was twenty-four below Fahrenheit. Then all in a moment the blizzard was upon us. A blast of wind, unheralded. A slanting whirl of snow.

It was 9.15 P.M. We used Greenwich time, here at the Plateau Station.

The schedule of the newly established Transpolar Line was clocked with Greenwich; it had been official now for five years for all air traffic. By nine thirty the accursed blizzard was roaring in a way that in my first winter here I had thought romantic. This was not one of the freak "blue blizzards," which, since they were first observed in 1955, had been an enigma outstanding even among the many freaks of Antarctic weather. This was not one of those, but an old-fashioned one, what we called a "hell-roarer."

There is a fearsome aspect to an Antarctic blizzard; I think beyond all other threats of nature it is the most awe inspiring. In the summer daylight it is bad enough; a drift of snow so dense that the daylight comes dully through; a mad blast whirling at a hundred miles an hour.

In the winter it is incredibly worse: infuriated elements in the darkness of the polar night. The world is a void, grisly and appalling, with the stabbing, freezing blast of death roaring like a mad monster run amuck, eager for something human to devour.

I sat with David Dragon this night of July 3, in our instrument room, listening to the howl of the storm. We were snug enough. There was nothing to fear. Yet the blizzard of the South Pole has a menace inescapable.

David cursed. "This thing will bury us if it keeps on. We should have a decent system of tunnels, Joe."

"I would. Give the men something to do. They're getting fat and lazy anyway."

WE had some forty men here at the station, a rough but good-natured crew. Three were married, and had their wives here. What a life for a woman! Several of the older men had had polar experience with the old-time exploring expeditions of twenty or thirty years past, just when the airplane was changing everything. We had them, with their rough and ready scientific knowledge; and a corps of mechanicians and ex-flyers. And the all-important cook and his helpers.

There was little to do. The Transpolar liner went through only once a fortnight; sometimes it did not even stop.

We always kept supplies here: food, fuel, and a well-equipped machine shop; half a dozen small emergency planes; dogs and sleds and a motor tank sled which was supposed to be marvelous, but in reality wasn't worth a damn in weather like this.

We were some three hundred miles from the Pole. There was, just established this year, a station similar to ours at the South Pole itself; and another at Little America on the Ross Sea, at the Bay of Whales near the edge of the Barrier. This was all territory belonging to the United States of America. The transcontinental trail was built with American capital, and the airline was financed by American millionaires, but it was government operated, as was nearly everything here in Antarctica.

A wild desolation, this Antarctic Continent; even now much of it was unknown. Naked rock, with a permanent mantle of ice and snow. Rivers and inland seas that never thawed; mountains massed with ice; congealed volcanos. It was a dead land, the home of the blizzard.

A continent of four million six hundred thousand square miles—as large as the United States and Mexico—it lay here astride of the South Pole, in general shape not unlike that of South

America. Its coast was all explored and charted. But its vast interior, its great reaches of plateau, and its tumbled mountain passes were, most of them, as unknown to-day as in the bygone times when Scott and Amundsen struggled here and Byrd founded the first permanent settlement of Little America.

The Polar airline, in the maintenance of which we were a link, came from Dunedin, New Zealand, crossed the Ross Sea, passed us, and the Pole, and continued north to Cape Town. It was the only airline over all Antarctica. A hazardous flight at best, and in the winter months, Heaven knows, but little less than foolhardy. Yet the traffic was encouraging; the route, with its New Zealand and African connections, began paying almost from the first. And so far, in twenty odd flights, there had been no disaster.

The liner was not due now until July 10. I recall that this night of July 3, as David and I sat listening to the blizzard, we had no intimation that anything unusual was impending. The blizzard certainly was usual enough. But by ten thirty it was obvious that it was worse than the usual run of them, even for this midwinter season.

"WE'LL be buried," David repeated. He went to one of our windows. We were in a low board room. The roof of the building was no more than fifteen feet above ground. A sturdy frame affair, with its special construction it was almost impervious to wind and cold. The window was high. Looking through its double pane we could just see over the frozen snow level; the flood lights of the landing field showed as a dim vague radiance through the howling white murk.

Buried? If this kept up, within a few hours our cañons of paths between the buildings of the station would be filled. They should have been roofed over into tunnels, as David said.

Our commander had gone on the last trip of the liner to his sick wife in Cape Town. David was in temporary charge of the station. I was radiophone operator. I had been, in my twenty-two years, almost everything incongruous, from mechanic at Bennett Field, New York, to flyer on a local mail route over the New Zealand mountains; student at the Belfast University, and wireless operator of a tanker that took me everywhere. An Irishman; my name, Joe Welch; short, stocky, redheaded, and a scrapper by nature, as David very often reminded me.

"Lucky the ship isn't due to-night," David commented. "One of these times they'll hit into a blizzard like this."

His gesture was expressive of the great air liner flung like a feather into perdition. He stretched his huge, lean length into a chair; picked up a book, yawned and flung it down.

"Hell of a life, Joe."

"Right," I agreed. I prepared to send my eleven o'clock routine report to headquarters in Little America, or to the American Meteorologic Station in Dunedin if I could get them direct.

"Get your statistics, David."

He yawned again and left the room. My best friend, this David Dragon. He was an orphan like myself, but with a far better education than I, and a flair for science as well as adventure. David at this time was twenty-six. A lean, powerful giant of a fellow; crisp, wavy brown hair; a rugged, handsome face, keen blue eyes, and an ability to handle men for all his lazy good

nature. A fellow of innate refinement and culture, gone like myself somewhat profane from living so constantly among men.

He came back in a moment; tossed me his scribbled memoranda. "Roaring like forty demons, and the worst is yet to come, Joe. Minus 32 degrees Fahrenheit. Barometer down another two-tenths. Ralston says the anemometer won't register all the wind."

"What's it give?"

"Hundred and thirty-two miles an hour. Nice little breeze. But it actually might be two hundred, Ralston says. It's a wonder somebody wouldn't invent some decent instruments."

He slouched down beside me. The low room shook with a blast of wind. The snow was piled solid now against the window. "Rattle it off, Joe. And if you get Dunedin, or anywhere else in civilization, tell them, with my love, that I damn well wish they were here—and I were there."

I tried for Dunedin on the radiophone, and then on the short wave. But before I got them the near-by operator at Little America cut in, calling me. His voice was tense.

I took the message. My face must have gone white, for David stared at me in astonishment.

"What is it?"

"Clarke. Special flyer coming through to-night."

"The hell there is." He went grim. "Are they crazy?"

"Wait." I took the rest of it. I could not hear Clarke very well, and he seemed hardly able to hear me at all. The interference, due to this accursed blizzard, rattled my head phone like a million tiny drums gone mad. I recall that at first I was annoyed at Clarke. Damn fools to check a ship through on a night like this. If it was forced down—a hundred miles from here say—we'd have a fine chance of getting out to it! But in a moment I was white and shaking, with stark fear striking at me. Helga was on this flyer!

"HELGA?" David gasped.

"Don't know."

"Tell Clarke to hold it. This is no regular storm!"

"The liner's gone past Clarke. They checked it through; conditions weren't like this down there."

"Tell him to call it back." David was pacing the room with gigantic strides. "Crazy idiot! Hasn't he got communication? Can't he call it back? Where is it, Joe?"

"Just left there. Wait, I can't hear him. Oh, damn this storm!"

I got the full details from Clarke. He had been trying to get me for half an hour. His chief had passed the liner; then tried to recall it as the storm swept down—but could not establish communication.

Clarke's signals died. In this accursed storm everything was uncertain. I tried for him and then gave it up. David stared at me.

"Well?"

"Well, that's all. We're out of business, or Clarke is, or the plane is. Everybody, probably."

Helga coming? Clarke had given me a message from her. Coming here to see David and me on a small flyer, on official business of the United States War Department.

"What's that mean?" David demanded.

I couldn't answer that. It could mean anything. There were some funny international laws here in Antarctica. It is not up to me to criticize them; wiser men than I drafted them. There was

no sign of war here, though I will say that from the beginning the colonization of Antarctica brought a strangely intense rivalry between the nations.

Last of the continents on earth, Antarctica seemed to inspire the world's cupidity. A God-forsaken place to live, but there was undoubtedly tremendous potential wealth here, in the whaling, the fisheries, and the mines. It was the last storehouse of the world's wealth, and its exploration fired every nation into activity. There was Great Britain's clash with Chile in 1943, for instance. That is a matter of history now. And because, by what freak of diplomatic reasoning no one can fathom, the United States chose to consider that the Monroe Doctrine must be enforced even in Antarctica, it brought us into serious dispute with the British. But there was no war; and Chile undoubtedly was wrong anyway.

"War?" David demanded.

"He didn't say war. He said she was coming from the United States War Department."

It might be trouble with the Antarctic natives. Unlike the Eskimos, the nomad Antarcticans seemed hostile. They had a government of a sort, but little was known of it—and no civilized nation had as yet recognized it.

War? But it was all driven from my mind by the realization that Helga was here in this storm. The plane was coming, fighting its way toward us; with luck, Clarke had said, it ought to reach us by 1 A.M.

Luck? If it didn't turn back, or get forced down, with luck it might get through.

David growled. "Why in hell could that fool girl be coming down here, on official business of the War Department?"

There was no room in my thoughts for such a question. I could only envisage the flyer caught in the black polar night in this mad whirl of storm —with Helga aboard.

Helga Johnson, David's friend. Like ourselves, she was another orphan; like us also in her flair for adventure. Her father had been a polar explorer, and, I understood vaguely, an inventor. He had been lost in the Antarctic with the ill-fated Blakely expedition, eight years ago. Helga was a strangely capable, self-reliant girl of twenty, of a sort that only this era of youthful achievement could produce. A good pal, David called her. But she was more than that, infinitely more than that, to me. For though we had never openly spoken of it, we had looked into each other's eyes and knew that some day we would bring to one another the fulfilled romance of all our dreams.

I sat stricken. Helga, caught tonight in the freezing grip of this blizzard!

CHAPTER II.

"THIS ENEMY!"

THAT was a terrible two hours I put in from eleven to one that night. I did not dare leave my instrument; but something was wrong with it; I couldn't bring in anything. The blizzard howled as badly as ever. The snow was a smother of murk, roaring almost horizontally against our buildings on the wings of a wind well over a hundred miles an hour.

David was all over the place on scores of duties. When we heard that the ship was coming through, he routed out the men. There were some ten long low buildings in the station group. Even in good weather the peaks of

their roofs were only a little above the level of the packed snow blanket. Cañon paths connected them. The paths were filled now, and the men wallowed through them. The mess hall, on the southern side, was buried completely in a twenty-foot soft drift, with only its heated chimney sticking up. David got through to it with the electric hand plow. But the opened path was gone again in a moment.

He came into me. His furs were solid with snow, he flung back his *parka* and stamped.

"What a night. Anything doing, Joe?"

"No."

The cold radiating from him sent a chill over the little room. I shivered; but it was from fear. "No. Out of business."

"Ralston's got a crew trying to get to the aërial. It may be down—I'm having all the outside connections tested. Do the best I can, Joe."

"If that ship goes down and they try to call us, helpless out there . . ."

He stood staring at me. "I know. I've got the lights going on the field yet. But you can't tell where it begins or ends—you can barely see the lights at fifty feet."

A man came to my door. "Cook says there's hot coffee ready in the mess if you want it."

"Right, Swenson, thank you. Bring some in here for Welch, and a sandwich. Joe, if we should hear from them—if they're fallen—"

"What would you go out with? The motor sled?"

To go into the open in a storm like this seemed almost suicidal. He did not answer me. He demanded: "What time is it?"

"Twelve thirty."

"By one o'clock, Clarke said. They'll get through, Joe. If it's a government plane it's likely to be pretty airworthy, and skillfully handled. But we've got to keep the lights going."

He turned away. At the door he flung back at me: "Keep at it. If anything's wrong here, we'll fix it—you might bring a call in any time."

Twelve thirty. My coffee arrived, but I barely tasted it. Twelve forty-five. The accursed phone remained dead. In my fancy I could see the plane, with Helga, out there bucking this blast of wind. If they had any sense they'd descend. But where? How could any plane come down with even decent safety in that tumbled isolation of ice crags and glaciers which lay between here and the Barrier? They wouldn't dare come down. Or if they did? If they slid into some soft drift, or smashed in some crevice of naked ice? Lying there to be buried by the new snow in an hour. Without the radio phone, how could we ever find them?

DAVID poked his head in. "Nothing, Joe?"

"No."

"Your connections are all right. Keep trying. No sign outside. But the lights are all going and everything's ready. The beacons on the trail are burning; that would guide them."

I said vaguely: "Maybe they turned back. Might be back at Little America by now."

"Yes, true enough. I hope so."

He left me again. One o'clock. Then, after an eternity, one thirty.

I caught a signal. My heart was smothering me as I went after it.

From the plane. A distress call! Longitude one hundred and sixty degrees. Yes, that was fair enough—on the established, lighted course directly

between us and the Ross Sea Station. Then I heard the voice!

"Longitude one hundred and sixty degrees, on the trail. A beacon near us."

I cursed. Damn fool, why couldn't he tell the latitude?

I shouted into the sender. "Where are you? Latitude what?"

"Down — this enemy — longitude one hundred and sixty degrees—latitude about eighty-five degrees, thirty-two minutes."

We were eighty-five degrees, forty minutes! Only a few miles from us!

"Down—brought down by this enemy—help!"

The signals died. I leaped to my feet; rushed off for David. The words were ringing in my head. "Down—brought down by this enemy—help!"

This enemy! That didn't mean the blizzard. Enemy? Who would dare attack a plane bearing the United States mails? Certainly no civilized government. Bandits then. There was rumored to be a band of international outlaws in the mountains of Antarctica. Renegades, escaped criminals from many nations, hiding here, ruling the ignorant natives. There was said to be a "White Chief" of them. There were many tales of him —a sort of super modern Robin Hood, hiding here and calling himself ruler of Antarctica. I had never taken much stock in this; a plane could be lost in a storm, and people with too much imagination would blame it on the outlaws. But now?

"This enemy." Did that mean the White Bandit?

IT was incredibly ominous, out in the blackness of the storm. We did not dare launch a plane; we started north through the surface snow, some twenty of us. With the wind at our backs and the light of the tank in front, the dogs followed in our track docilely enough.

David and I were alone, running with an empty, ballasted sled. My heart held a prayer that it might bring back Helga.

The tank lumbered directly in front of us. We followed the established beacon-lighted trail; it was basically some twenty feet wide, and fairly straight and level, with a hard packed surface at its bottom. There was a smother of new snow on it now. The tank plowed its way through, its motor flinging up a white cloud that gleamed in the tank's searchlight. If it could hold the trail, all right; once off it, the tank was helpless.

We struggled forward for what might have been a mile. The light of the first trail-beacon came into sight in the driving murk ahead of us. The wind ripped and tore at our backs, an incredibly piercing blast; to turn and face it and draw a breath was impossible. It flung us forward. I recall vaguely thinking: "How can we face it to go back?"

We passed the beacon. The tank went into a twenty-foot drift, but got through. We fought our way after it, while the frightened dogs, for all their training, tangled themselves up and all but floundered into the yawning tumbled crags beside us.

Another mile. The trail wound up through a frozen mountain pass with the wind howling like a demon through it and the tank almost buried in the drifts. Then we came out again upon the ice cap of the upper plateau, where the wind caught us full, and the ice was, in places, swept clean as polished marble. A numb, narcotic struggle. I found my thoughts in a dull whirl of

chaos. This gray-black whirling void, which was the world, stinging, nipping, biting at me, flinging me about, numbing my senses until it was all dream-like, confused.

The beacons went past. We had figured that the fallen plane could not be more than ten miles from the station, perhaps even less. "This enemy!" The words echoed through my dulled mind. We were all armed.

David shouted at me; the wind tore at his words and flung them away; even the roaring of the tank was lost; we could see the blue-yellow spit of its exhaust, but hear nothing. David gestured off into the swirling darkness beside us. But there was nothing to see, and in a moment he stepped from the sled on which he had been riding and wallowed on beside me.

And then the accursed tank went astray and plunged nose down into a crevice. They couldn't back it out. Its crew came ruefully from the cabin and we left it, with its gleaming searchlight slanting drunkenly up into the void.

Another half mile. David shouted suddenly: "Joe, look up there! This is one of the blue blizzards now."

A flash of tiny blue lightning stabbed through the murk of the sky. It was incredibly ominous—weird, almost supernatural. Lightning was rational to a summer thunderstorm of the tropics; but down here in the polar winter night it was uncanny.

There was only one flash.

A beacon came at last in sight to guide us, but we knew that the floundering, frightened dogs could not go much farther. A dozen times we had been off the trail and floundered back again. David and I were leading. He suddenly seized me; we brought the sled to a stop; the sleds behind us came lurching up into a tangle of dogs and men. We huddled in the trail.

WE could all see it, off to one side in the dull glow of the near-by beacon—the fallen plane. It seemed uninjured. It lay on an ice hummock from which with luck it might even have taken off. The drift snow was piling over it, rounding the sharpness of its outlines.

But there was no sign of any one there. A small cabin light was still burning.

We started forward again. Abreast of the plane we stopped; it was a hundred feet to one side of us.

From somewhere in the howling darkness a moving light showed. I remember my impression that it was large and far away. No! Close and small, a blue spot of light. I suddenly became aware that all around us, as we huddled in the center of the trail, blue spots of light were moving. Then I saw a figure—human—a man!

Instant impressions. We were taken wholly by surprise. An impression of horror at something almost uncanny. Men surrounding us—men out here in this storm who were not dressed in furs, but in a garment of white, like ice, or snow. Ghostly figures—but they were solid enough; one leaped upon me, seized me.

We were all struggling in the grip of them. One of our men fired a shot; then another. I saw the spurts of flame, heard the shots dimly as the wind ripped the sound away.

David was gone from me. Then I saw his huge figure fighting with a cluster of white shapes around him. His automatic spat. One of his assailants fell. But the rest bore him down. I caught a glimpse of a man's face close to mine. His arms were holding

me as I fought to get out my automatic.

Something struck me. I staggered. Then fell from another blow. The weight of a man was on me as my senses faded.

CHAPTER III.

OUTLAWED ANTARCTICANS.

WHEN I recovered consciousness I was lying in a cabin. It seemed to be in movement. I opened my eyes to a dim blue glow. I was lying on something soft and white. The white concave walls of a small room were over me like a vault. There were windows, with a dark blur outside them. A sweep of movement, and I realized that this was the cabin of a large plane in which I was lying.

I shifted to one elbow. My furs were still on me. My head was roaring, but I seemed unhurt. The taste in my mouth and a vague chemical odor clinging to me, made me think that I had been drugged.

A whisper sounded in my ear, David's voice. "Joe."

I rolled over. David was sitting beside me. "They said you'd be all right, Joe. Easy! Don't call out."

I stammered: "Why—what has—"

"You were drugged. They knocked us out. Easy, now, there's a dozen of them within hearing."

The room was chill, and fairly silent save for an outside whirl of wind and a murmuring hum of the motors. I saw an archway leading to another small interior beyond, glowing with cold blue light. The white forms of men moved about in there.

I was fully conscious now. A hand touched my face, lightly as a caress. Helga leaned down over me!

"Joe!"

Helga, safe! I seized her hand; I sat up and found her sitting with David beside me. Helga, not in polar furs, but in a modish blue cloak, with an incongruous aviator's helmet.

David explained quickly. "Took only us alive.. Killed all our men, and the crew of Helga's plane."

I sat tense, confused, listening to what they had to tell me. The plane, not unduly in distress from the storm, had been flying low, trying to follow the beacon trail. A blue stab of light had come up, caught it.

"Brought us down," Helga whispered. "We came down, and all in a moment we were set upon, as you were. Our operator stuck to his phone—and then they rushed in, and killed him there."

"They? Who?" I demanded.

"Bandits," whispered David. "Oh, they exist, right enough! The White Bandits!"

We sat whispering in the swaying, blue-lighted cabin. My gaze clung to Helga's solemn, intent face; and then wandered to the archway beyond which the white, ghostly shapes of our captors were visible. One came to the arch and gazed in at us.

A man's figure, short and heavy set. A white garment clung closely about him; he had a round, bullet head of close-clipped white hair. The light glinted blue on his peering eyes. He turned back into the other room.

I realized that these white garments of our captors were the Perez insulated fabrics. It was used in the polar zones, particularly by the Latins, who disliked furs.

Helga was whispering: "Get your wits, Joe. They drugged you. Are you all right?"

"Yes. Helga, what—"

David whispered: "She was coming down to study the blue storms, Joe."

I have mentioned that Helga's father had been an inventor. Helga seldom spoke of him. She grew up, with her flair for science, studying meteorology, as her father evidently had before her. And at seventeen she had received a surprisingly responsible position in the United States Meteorological Bureau near Washington.

SHE cut in on David now. I listened, amazed at her vehement words. There was a driving energy in the make-up of Helga Johnson.

"The blue storms of Antarctica, Joe, are unnatural."

Unnatural? Heaven knows they seemed so. I had only actually seen one of them—a gray-black cloud, with swinging wind and heavy snowfall, and blue lightning darting through the cloud. Unnatural!

"Not the storms of nature, Joe. Man-made storms! Artificial. They told me I was crazy in Washington when I suggested it two years ago. But they gave me a laboratory and assistants. And last week we made one of the storms in miniature!"

David said: "Here in Antarctica, some one is influencing the weather."

"But who?" I demanded again. "And why?"

"The outlaws; these bandits, wouldn't you say so? The White Chief—Robin Hood—call him what you will. The Antarcticans, if you like; those fellows."

He gestured to the adjoining cabin. He added:

"Why? Why influence the weather? To keep our nations out of here. Drive us out; keep out our encroaching colonies. This is 1960, Joe. The Indians of North America tried to do it with tomahawks and bows and arrows. But this is 1960."

And I had always sneered at the tales of White Bandits!

I whispered: "But why attack us? Or Helga?"

I understood it, though vaguely, even before she answered. She had discovered the secret of the blue storms.

She said: "I sent you a message, Joe, on the short wave, but you didn't get it. Like a fool, I signed my name and mentioned the blue blizzards. It must have been intercepted. They're after me. Oh, you needn't think we're dealing just with ignorant Antarctic savages. They've got a ruler—a white man of scientific knowledge."

"And the scum of half a dozen nations," David put in. "Escaped criminals. A lot of them are Chileans; or anyway, they speak Spanish."

"And English," said Helga. "That fellow there in the archway speaks Spanish and English—he was in here a while ago."

The white figure was still lurking there, as though trying to overhear us, and watching us. I fumbled for my automatic; it was gone. The fellow in the archway suddenly advanced and stood over us. I saw him now as a man of indeterminate middle age, short and heavy set. The white garment clung close to him. A jacket, and a skirt. The skirt was tight, but it stretched with the movement of his legs. His feet were encased in white fur shoes. His head of close-clipped black hair was bare; but there was a white hood, thrown back, dangling from his shoulders.

Helga said suddenly: "You're the one who speaks English, aren't you"

"Yes."

"What are you doing with us?"

He grinned. "You are Helga Johnson. And you are Joseph Welch—and you, David Dragon. We do not make a mistake." He spoke English with a Spanish accent. But he was fluent.

David said: "That's who we are. Who are you? What do you want of us? You're a Chilean, aren't you?"

The man struck his chest. "I am Ramón Margones, Antarctican, as you call our country. Naina ordered me to bring you."

THERE was a brief silence. "Why?" demanded Helga. "I suppose you realize you've murdered Americans. You've attacked the flag of the United States."

He did not answer.

"Who is Naina?" I demanded.

"Naina, a white girl, daughter of the White Chief who now is dead."

He gazed down at us contemplatively. The blue light fell full on his face. Swarthy skin; dark eyes; a high-bridged nose; a blue stubble of beard on his heavy jowls. An evil-looking scoundrel.

He said at last: "It is not for you to question me. *Si vosotros queréis—*"

"Talk English," said David.

The bandit grinned again. "You are people of spirit. But you of the red head do not speak?"

I said: "I can speak right enough. You've murdered twenty of our people; how is it you didn't murder us three also?"

He waved that away. "*Si vosotros queréis*—if you wish to look out of the window—"

"Thanks," said Helga dryly. She stood up. Drawn to her full height, Helga was not over five feet two inches. A compact, sturdy little body, perfect always in health and strength. She fronted the Antarctican. "You think we ought to be afraid of you, but we're not."

"No," he said. "I notice that you are not." He gazed down upon her with an obvious admiration — a look on his face that set my heart pounding. I had cause afterward to recall that look.

David said: "Where are we? You can at least tell us that?"

"We are in the mountains of the Weddell Quadrant."

A region least known to-day of all this vast white continent. The Weddell Mountains, some of our charts called it — a tumbled, mountainous area, lying at a general altitude of fifteen thousand feet; the stormiest, coldest, most inaccessible region remaining upon earth. No nation as yet had claimed it.

Margones added: "You question too freely. We will reach the white valley presently. I will call you."

He turned and left us, grotesque in the white flexible skirt clinging to his legs.

CHAPTER IV.

PRISONER IN THE CLIFF HOUSE.

WE stood at the window. I had opportunity now to notice more of the details of this plane. There was nothing remarkable about it. A Gorgsky body of the triplane model, rather an out-of-date affair now; a huge body of the style most popular in the early 1950's. It seemed in good mechanical condition; the thrum of its muffled motors was dimly audible to us. But in the cabin there were signs of its age—and looking out the glassite window I could see one of the wings, where it had been crudely patched.

I whispered to David and Helga: "Where did they get this ship, do you suppose?"

David shrugged. "Stole it. Years ago, by the look of it."

Helga looked at us. "The Blakely expedition had a plane like this."

"Look outside," David interrupted. "The blue lightning!"

Along the bulging white side of the cabin, up ahead by the motors, a sudden flash of blue light stabbed into the polar night. A silent flash; it was repeated once or twice, then gone. I saw white swirls of vapor rolling sluggishly aside from where it had been—rolling like the white bow-wave from a speeding ship. Liquid air, or something akin to it, congealed by the cold of the blue light-ray.

"That's what brought down our plane," said Helga, "and killed our men when it struck them. This plane is equipped to create the blue storms, Joe. We worked on the principle in a small way in Washington."

"Easy, Helga," David cautioned. It seemed that the fellow Margones was listening to us. Helga changed at once. She said, casually: "How high up are we, can you tell?"

A thousand feet or so below us a white landscape was slipping past. There were peaks of ghostly white mountains down there, a cataclysm of jagged ice peaks; glaciers; darkly white mountain passes, solid with drift snow; or again, an open spread of ice cap plateau; undulating like a storm-swept sea suddenly congealed into frozen immobility; and great valleys, depressed a thousand feet, white-rimmed, gray-black in their depths.

All was ghostly down there as a dream of frozen, silent desolation. I tried to gauge our height and the visible movement of the surface and thus determine our speed. It seemed that we were flying fairly fast; three hundred miles an hour possibly.

We had passed now beyond the region of the blizzard. It was not snowing outside. Leaden clouds swept overhead; but they were broken, and occasionally the brilliant frosty stars showed behind them.

How long we stood silent at the window I cannot say. No more than half an hour, doubtless.

The sky was clearing; the clouds gleaming upon the silent blue-white mountains beneath us. The mountains seemed reaching ever higher. We ourselves were ascending. Twenty thousand feet? I think so. Certainly there were peaks higher than that, in a hugely towering mountain ridge. We swept over it. I saw the heights extending in each direction to the distant purple horizon where the stars hung like fallen gems. Vast sierras, these towering mountains. It seemed that the ridge curved slightly—as though this were some small segment of a huge circle.

WE crossed low over the heights. On the inner side the mountains dropped sheer, almost perpendicular, down into a gray purple darkness. A caldron here, in depth five thousand feet at least beneath its encircling rim. We could barely see its bottom—a gray-white, almost level spread. It was a huge, circular valley.

"The Valley of Drift-Snow." It is on our present-day charts, with the name the Antarcticans gave it. Its almost level bottom, crossed in a few places by small, ragged uplands, lies at the thirteen-thousand-foot altitude, with a rim of mountain heights towering everywhere some five to ten thousand feet higher.

Helga murmured: "We're descending."

We were slackening and dropping rapidly downward. The blue stabs of light outside were extinguished. A white searchlight showed from the bow of our ship. It swung into the starlight, then downward.

There was a line of ragged broken hills under us, a volcanic-looking region full of pits and craters, congealed with frozen masses of ice and snow.

We dropped in a spiral over a white cañon. Upon its floor I saw human habitations—a little huddled group of domed ice huts, with tunneled paths in the snow pack between them; and a few huts that seemed of timber, miscellaneous driftwood, with skins and furs covering the wooden frames into a semblance of dwelling places.

A forlorn Antarctic settlement. A thousand people or less might be here, ignorant, half savage natives. There are many such groups of nomads in the desolate interior of Antarctica. But this village, we saw at once, was different. There were a few lights here—not tallow or burning oil, but battery lights of the modern Ashtakon storage batteries. And there was this plane we were in — we saw now its landing field, with crude old-fashioned floodlights. Forlorn, but fairly modern. And off to one side was what seemed the entrance to a cavern in the side of the cañon. This was lighted; and as we came nearer I could see figures passing in and out of it.

A strange mixture of broken-down, scientific modernity was mingled here with the savagery of the native Antarctican. A bandit's camp. We saw the same mixture in the people who crowded around the plane when we landed. Men, women and children, most of them the heavy-featured, high cheek-boned, slant-eyed type of natives. They were garbed in polar furs, the women wearing ornamental belts. Mingled with them were others dressed in the Perez white fabric giving insulation against the cold.

They all crowded us, jabbering in the guttural native language. But there was a mixture of English and Spanish with it. And there were some evil-looking fellows like Margones—renegades from South America, doubtless. One of them flung a coarse remark at Helga and plucked at her. I shoved him off.

"Let us alone, damn you!"

Margones waved them away. "Come," he ordered us.

We shoved through the crowd. The Antarcticans were small people, and so were most of the bandits. David towered like a giant among them.

"This way," said Margones. He led us toward the cave mouth. A man stopped us; an Antarctican. Margones jabbered at him, and he let us pass.

WE entered the tunnel. The air was at once warmer—stale, but there was a current of it coming out. We went back perhaps a hundred feet. The tunnel opened into a cavern. Lights were here, showing a few stone huts that were built on the cavern floor. We passed them and turned to the wall. Polar dogs crowded around us—there had been some outside, but there seemed many more of them in here. Sleds and other polar equipment were standing about.

"This way," Margones said again.

The perpendicular wall of the cavern had lighted windows in it. A single large dwelling was cut here in the cliff face—a doorway at the bottom; two stories of windows, with a crude wooden balcony at the top story. It looked

something like a house of the cliff-dwelling Indians of Arizona and New Mexico.

A guard was at the doorway. We passed him and entered a dimly lighted corridor. Margones pushed us always ahead of him. There had been no opportunity for resistance even if it had been practical, which it was not. We were unarmed; and Margones had what I assumed was a cylinder weapon of the blue-ray. It was clipped to his belt; and in his hand now he flourished a new modern-looking automatic.

The interior of this cliff house was surprisingly spacious. We passed arches giving on interior rooms, all dimly blue-white. Down a narrow flight of steps—ice blocks and stone set in a narrow incline.

The lower corridor was narrow. The air was warmer, and in one place almost fetid.

David said sharply: "Where are you taking us?"

"To wait for Naina," Margones retorted. "She sends for you presently."

He stopped at a door. It was the first metal I had seen, a metallic door set in a metal frame. Margones fumbled at it, pushed it open. He shoved us. David resisted; then yielded with a shrug. A current of fresher air was coming out.

The door clanged behind us; Margones was gone.

We were in a small stone room. A rug of fur was on its floor. Furniture of stone: chairs, a couch, a table with a shaded light.

A man stood by the table. A thin, erect figure dressed in trousers and a shirt of crudely fashioned skins. The light gleamed on his sparse gray hair and his thin face. A prisoner here in this cliff dungeon.

He stood trembling, gazing at us. Then I became aware that it was Helga at whom he was gazing. And that she was standing stricken, staring at him. She had been twelve years old when she had last seen him. Now he gazed at this grown young woman. He stammered: "Why—why, Helga, my little girl—so grown!"

"Father—father dear!"

She ran into the shelter of his trembling, eager arms.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT JOHNSON TOLD.

IT is not my part to attempt a detailed record of this reunion between Helga and her father. Their emotion was something into which David and I could not intrude. I had always known Helga as a girl of utter self-reliance, with a dominant, purposeful energy characteristic of one far beyond her years. Fearless, with a breezy, direct manner at times almost masculine. Yet she could be tender, too; gently feminine—ah, I had seen that mood, and upon it were built my dreams of what might be for her and me. She sat now beside her father, with her arms around him. They whispered.

I heard him say: "Such a big girl, Helga. Why, you're beautiful. And —you tell me your dear mother is dead . . . You remembered me all these years, Helga. Tell me, now, more about your mother."

There were tears in Helga's eyes, a catch of sobbing in her voice as she answered him. David and I turned away.

We were here in this room no more than an hour; but many strange things the captive Johnson had to tell us.

The Blakely expedition had been attacked without warning by the

bandits. The Antarcticans took only Johnson and five of his companions alive.

"Brought us here," he said. "Eight years is a long time. I have been prisoner."

He spoke with a drab, weary voice; he passed a hand across his eyes, looked up at us and smiled gently. A smile so like Helga's!

"I get confused, talking again to my own people. Five of our men; they have all died since."

I said, "Is this Naina ruler of these people? The fellow that took us spoke of her."

"Yes, she is the ruler. Her father—they called him the White Chief—is dead. And she commands now. Just a girl like you, Helga; a girl hardly as old as you are."

I can only sketch this hour's talk we had with Johnson. A furtiveness was presently upon us. We were all prisoners here, unarmed, behind a barred door. Johnson said one of the bandits undoubtedly was on guard outside, perhaps within hearing.

We spoke softly, guardedly. With the emotion of Helga's unexpected reunion with her father past, we told Johnson all we could of outside conditions. He had been shut off from the world for eight years; that is a long time, here in Antarctica. Eight years had brought many changes.

The members of the Blakely expedition had been found by a rescuing party apparently frozen. One plane was missing, and six of the men. The world called it a disaster; there was no thought then of bandits.

Johnson told us of this "White Chieftain." He was, or had been, an American; a man of sixty-odd. A renegade; a fugitive, perhaps.

Johnson said, "He is dead now—died of heart failure last year. A strange fellow. A man of intelligence and of scientific knowledge. He came down here, gathered the natives together, and became their chief. He hated the United States with a deadly hatred. I'll tell you about that presently."

NAINA was his daughter; her mother, who had died years ago, was a native woman, strangely white, like an albino. Her father, dying, had bequeathed his hatred of America to his daughter.

"About the blue storms," Helga began. She told her father how, in Washington, she had been able to work out the secret of them. David and I listened, amazed; we found we had known so little of Helga!

When Helga was a child, Johnson had been working on the theories of weather control; he had discovered the blue ray, and Helga, at twelve years old, had known of it. As she grew up she had followed in her father's path, to rediscover what had seemed lost by his death.

He said to David and me, "I had kept it secret, but I had the apparatus with the Blakely expedition. We were going to test it out down here; and then we were captured. This white ruler—he was named Roberts—made me explain its workings. I did that, or he would have killed me. He has used it to make the weather of Antarctica worse than it really is. He has kept many exploring expeditions from this region here. They start this way, but always a blizzard turns them back. Occasionally he made a raid. I suppose he must have known of Helga."

"The White Bandit, we call him," I said. We explained what we knew of the vague tales.

"Yes," said Johnson, "I have heard him say with pride that he was known as the White Bandit. Well, he has kept up a semblance of government here. He has stolen supplies—he has just the one airplane, and a radiophone receiving apparatus. The struggle for existence here—"

He sketched how they had lived: hunting the polar animals in the summer, stealing food and ammunition from the colonial settlements, occasionally raiding an exploring party, appropriating its instruments, supplies, and equipment. Strange conditions, in the colonization of a new continent! Only our modern world of 1960 could produce them.

I said, "And this man Margones, these South Americans?"

Johnson lowered his voice. "They are Chileans." He rose and went to the door. It was locked on the outside. He listened, and then came back to us.

He half whispered, "This Margones, of them all, I fear most. He joined us two years ago, he and about twenty of his band. The Chilean Antarctic colony of Santiago Pequeño isn't far from here—only about three hundred miles."

Chile had a colony stretching to the coast; the principal settlement was called Santiago Pequeño. Margones and his fellows had evidently come from there.

"They joined Naina's father," said Johnson. "Protesting loyalty—but they have no loyalty to any one. A band of cutthroats." He lowered his voice still further. "There is gold in the mountains here. I'll tell you presently. But what I mean, I think Margones figures that Naina may know where it is. She doesn't; she isn't interested. But I know."

"You?" murmured David.

"Yes. But let's not talk of that now. Margones and his band are after it. Perhaps there is Chilean capital ready to finance them. If they could locate it, and plant the Chilean flag—"

HE broke off. He put his thin hands on David's arm; he was so slender and frail a man beside David's powerful figure. He added, "You give me new courage. We've got to escape from here. They'll take you in to Naina presently—"

David burst out, "You've told us a lot, and yet it seems so little! What does Naina want of us?"

Johnson did not know. He said, "She is a strange character, this white girl. Her father was more than a little demented, it seemed to me, obsessed with hatred for his native United States. And Naina, born and brought up here, knows no other emotion; her ruling passion is that of hatred. She's doing what she thinks her dead father would want her to do; and being a woman, she goes to extremes." He smiled. He added slowly, "I think she plans now to attack the United States, through the United States colony here, the village of Little America."

"Attack it?" I gasped.

"Yes. With what she calls her nation—a thousand or fifteen hundred people; that's all there are here, struggling for a bare existence, possessing a few rifles and automatics, not much ammunition, sleds and dogs, and that one airplane."

"But that's crazy," David protested.

"Yes. But she has the blue ray—I had with Blakely about forty hand projectors, and the weather control mechanism, which is in the plane. Crazy to attack a civilized nation? Of course it is! But you'll hear her talk.

She's going to drive the United States out of Antarctica! Well, she might even do that, temporarily. Bring death to Little America."

He stared at us with his somber sunken eyes. "Extraordinary character, this Naina. So beautiful, so young a girl, trained from birth into a warped and twisted humanity. It's just a little pathetic."

A footstep sounded outside the door; a hand was on the lock. Johnson gripped us.

"Margones coming. Say nothing of all this; and be careful—don't anger Naina."

The door was opening. Johnson whispered hurriedly, "Watch your chance. If we can get out of here, get back to civilization— You give me new courage; I have been imprisoned here so long, alone."

Margones came in. He eyed us shrewdly.

"You have been planning how to escape from us? *Verdad?* And telling to each other your troubles? *Bueno!* That is what Naina wanted. It will save her much to explain. She will see you now." He added curtly, "The little girl can stay with you, Johnson. Naina say she is your daughter."

"Yes," said Johnson.

The bandit stood looking down at Helga. She stared up at him, frowning defiance; and again on his face I saw that leer of admiration which made me shudder.

He turned abruptly away; he said, "Come, *señores.*"

He barred the door upon Helga and her father. He led David and me along the dim corridor; up a winding underground staircase. Along another, larger tunnel passage.

We emerged at last into a cavelike blue-white room; into the presence of Naina. She whom ever afterward I thought of as the Snow Girl. Frozen beauty. Maiden carved in marble. Incredibly beautiful. Incredibly inhuman!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

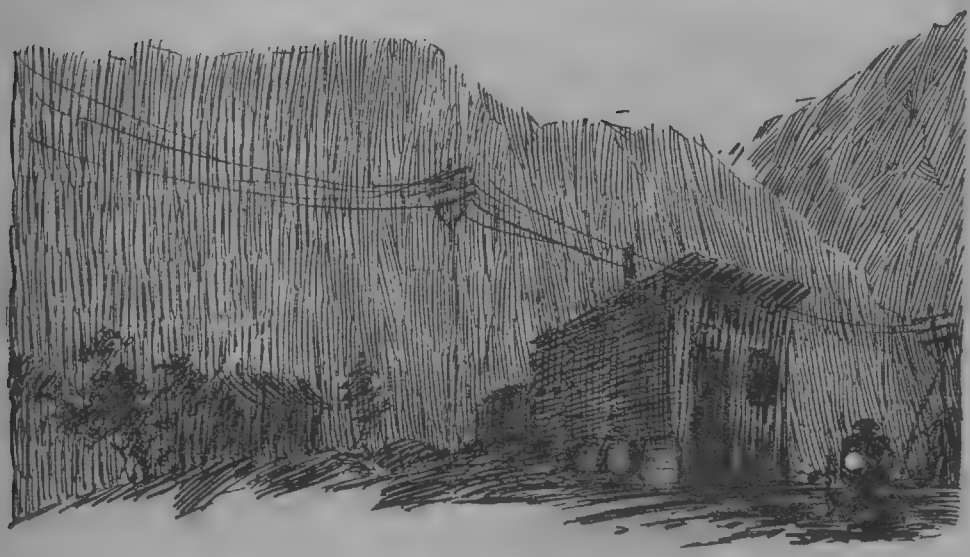
Women Rule Siamese Theater

THE women of Siam dress and cut their hair like men, and even appear to act the same. Both sexes smoke or chew the betel nut, both wear the *panung*, a cloth which is wound around the hips and then pulled up between the legs and fastened in the back to give the appearance of breeches.

In the theater, however, women rule entirely, for there are no men acting. Women play the parts of both actors and actresses, and sometimes do it very effectively, especially when called upon to register the masculine emotions of rage, jealousy, deep thought. French plays are very popular and many have been translated into Siamese. Two or three plays are given during an evening, the intermissions being filled by Siamese dancing or musical acts in which a girl dancer keeps the rhythm of the music and wriggles every joint in her body, fingers and toes. The theater seats are hard wooden benches, but foreigners and royalty are placed in a box in front of the stage, which has chairs. The box is prominently placed so that its holders may be seen by all of the audience.

Wyman Sidney Smith.

The Dark Brotherhood



Dugan the two-fisted asked no man for odds or for help when he prepared to avert the threatened mine strike, in his own strong way

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

Author of "Hack Card," "Hack Line," etc

Novelette—Complete

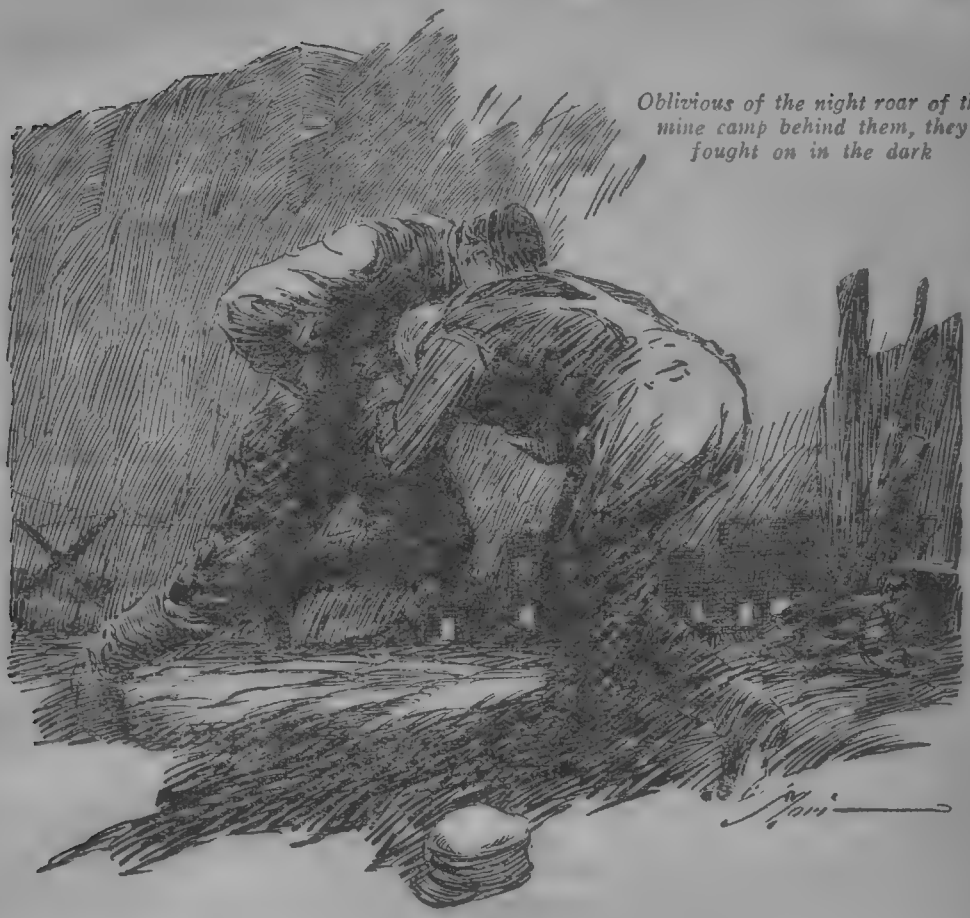
CHAPTER I.

A HARD MAN.

DUGAN rode up the seven miles of Hungry Horse Gulch in the caboose of a long freight train. With him were three other hard rock men. They were all broke. The train crew had seen to that. But they were not worried, for work awaited them at Hungry Horse. There was something else awaiting them too, something less profitable, but far more alluring. There was trouble.

Dugan stepped from the caboose in the middle of the camp's main street and stared at the mighty walls of the cañon arising from the very back yards of the houses before him. The bundle he carried in one hand contained his working clothes, boots, slicker and one clean shirt. Beneath his vest, not exactly comfortable, but safe, was a double-action Smith & Wesson forty-five. Beneath that in turn was a belt containing gold, of which the train crew knew nothing.

The four of them found a boarding house. It was an unpainted, unswept, unlovely sort of place. They did not mind. There floated up through the house from the kitchen a reassuring odor of hearty food such as hard rock men desire. They threw their bundles into their rooms, went to a saloon on the odd chance of picking up a drink,



Oblivious of the night roar of the mine camp behind them, they fought on in the dark

and then crossed the creek to seek out a job at the mines.

And the next morning, with overalls, boots and slickers, the four of them checked in for work at the golden El Dorado.

What became of the other three thereafter ceases to be of interest. They were hard rock men, and Hungry Horse held a thousand such. Dugan, however, was not a hard rock man. He was a detective, a secret agent, and not a man of the thousand knew it. Had one recognized him, in all likelihood Dugan would have died in some unpleasant manner that first morning in the dripping, dark crosscut where he worked, swinging a doublejack five hundred feet from the nearest sunlight.

But no one recognized him. Dugan had been a cow-puncher, a sailor, a railroader and many other things, but never a miner. That he lacked experience in his present profession meant little to him. He had that best of all substitutes, nerve. He needed it, for this was the realm of the secret Dark Brotherhood and the terrible Dark Angels.

Dugan was a hard man. He knew it and would talk about it on provocation. The detective agency for which he operated permitted him to work alone and questioned not his methods. Nor had they any cause to question

his results, which usually achieved the frustration of wily plots and the jailing, hanging or shooting of divers other hard men. He sent in periodic reports, and they kept hands off until he requested otherwise. By all this you will infer that Dugan was just a little harder than any man he had ever encountered.

NOW Dugan was all that, but he was not dour. He could laugh. He had a large mouth, set in a large jaw, which occupied a formidable portion of a large and not unhandsome face. He could open wide that mouth, while his broad blue eyes half closed and grew deeply wrinkled at the corners, and he could laugh so that his solid body shook with the force of it.

On his second night in Hungry Horse, Dugan accomplished two things. He succeeded in his original plan to join the Dark Brotherhood, and he also made the acquaintance of the Widow Frane.

It was at the post office, which was also the general store operated by the El Dorado Company, that the meeting with the widow occurred. Dugan was buying heavy woolen socks for his labors in the mine. There were many people in the place, miners, miners' wives, town folk of dubious degree, and Judith Frane.

She stood at the grocery counter, a tall and well-proportioned woman whom men would call handsome rather than pretty. She wore a black dress and shawl, and darker was the great mass of hair that drew severely from the clear, white face and gathered in a full knot at the back of the neck, just above the lace-trimmed collar. Beneath that dress her body was erect and full breasted and warmly proud. Her eyes were gray, the gray that shades into soft green, and they were sure and clear-sighted eyes.

Over her arm she carried a basket for her purchases, and the young clerk who filled it did so with respect and dispatch. She was a fine woman, as many a man in Hungry Horse would have averred. And it is worthy of note that having said that of her, he could say no more.

Perhaps Dugan guessed as much, and perhaps he was the more interested. He asked the man behind his counter:

"Who is she? The woman in black across there?"

"That 'un? That 'un's the Widow Frane. She keeps a boarding house up the street. She's a fine woman."

Dugan watched her.

"A fine woman, eh? She's that, and a hell of a lot more than you'll ever know. Here! Wrap up those socks in two packages. Quick now!"

So it was that as the widow walked along the worn plank sidewalk of Hungry Horse's only street, a voice at her elbow halted her. A man held out an unknown small package. His gaze met hers in unconcealed and certainly unabashed admiration.

"Here's your package, Mrs. Frane."

She did not reply at once. To her, whose purchases were exact and deliberate, the subterfuge was obvious. Perhaps she guessed that it was meant to be. A trace of a smile came and went on her even mouth. She took the package and dropped it into the basket.

"Thank you," she said, and continued on her way.

But Dugan was beside her, walking in step.

"I'm new here," he said. "I just took on at the El Dorado. Don't know anybody and I'm looking for some

sound advice. Where might a man find a place to live that's comfortable? A good boarding house, say?"

The sidewalk was busy with people. Twilight was falling on the gulch. At the mill up the creek the mighty stamps had ceased their clamor. From the mines came the rattle of shunted cars and the hiss of escaping steam. But these were distant sounds, peaceful sounds.

THE widow spoke in a cool voice. "I'm in that business myself. Maybe you had better ask a disinterested party."

"In that business? You keep a boarding house?"

"Yes."

"Then you have a new boarder, Mrs. Frane. I'm moving right over."

She looked at him as they walked. They were both of a height, and they stared, evenly and with a certain challenge.

"Indeed you're not," she said.

He smiled, undaunted.

"Why not?"

"There's not a room vacant."

"Well, and if there should be?"

"My people don't leave." With a trace of malice she added: "I'm very particular who I take in, you understand."

"Oh, of course. But supposing one does leave. What then?"

"I'd inquire around for a gentleman who wanted a clean, well-kept home."

"Well, here's one. Maybe now—"

"One what?"

His face broke into a grin.

"I'm no dude, if that's what you mean. I never had the time nor the desire. If there's enough gentlemen in this camp to fill a boarding house, I'll eat my boiled shirt."

"I'd learn how to recognize one first, if I were you." She could not down the gleam of humor that came into her eyes.

"But if I had the chance to mingle with them—" he insinuated.

The widow came to a halt. He stopped and faced her. She spoke with good-humored finality.

"I'm not so sure that you'd take advantage of the opportunity. I've no room vacant now. If one should be, perhaps you might inquire again." She moved to leave him and enter the house before which they stood.

"All right," agreed Dugan. "That's straight then. I can count on it?"

"Oh, certainly!"

With a smile, and a dismissing inclination of her head, the widow opened the door of the house and left Dugan alone on the sidewalk. For a moment he stared at the plain panels before him, painted a lifeless gray. Then he cast a critical eye over the front of the two-story frame house which rose from the edge of the walk without porch or ornament, noted the clean windows and the orderly white curtains, and he went off down the street with a chuckle in his throat.

CHAPTER II.

DUGAN'S WAY.

THAT noontime, while Dugan had been seated in the cross-cut with his lunch pail between his knees, he had been approached by another miner. The man gave his name as Murdock, and with but few preliminaries had sounded out Dugan's sympathies in the present split between the company and the men. Dugan had been duly cautious, but had finally committed himself to the side of the min-

ers. Thereupon Murdock had requested him to be on hand at the Nugget saloon at dark.

Dugan located the Nugget that evening. He entered and bought a drink. The place was crowded with men, and his entry had thrown a slight constraint on them. They eyed him, some covertly, some with hostility. They were all big, toil-hardened men, uncouth, unlettered, and by their own lights honest. They were passionately resentful of what they wholly believed to be their wrongs, and harried by the knowledge of their own individual impotence to right them. They were ridden by the fear of treachery. They were dangerous.

In a moment Dugan was accosted by his mentor, Murdock. Murdock was a long-limbed man, dark of visage and heavy-browed, deep-voiced and deadly earnest. He introduced Dugan to several of those nearest. Dugan greeted them heartily and stood treat at the bar. And thereafter the tension relaxed, at least so far as he was concerned. But there was a tension on the crowd that had nothing to do with him.

"You wait here a bit," Murdock instructed him, "and we'll bring you right into meeting. There's one tonight. It's upstairs. They'll take you right in, and glad to at that. We have to line up every man who'll stand by."

"Trouble?" ventured Dugan.

"You'll see. Trouble? Aye, and plenty of it."

"Tell me," said Dugan. "I've heard things."

Murdock told him.

There was nothing new in the tale to Dugan. A tale of smoldering, uncompromising bitterness which sprang from small reasons and, gathering strength, became a hidden torrent of wrath beneath a crumbling crust of apparent peace. Dugan had heard one side. He was now listening to the other.

The camp was a new one. It was loosely organized as yet, and the wealth torn from the depths of the earth had brought to the place the opportunists of half a hemisphere, the gamblers, trouble-makers and parasites who dwell always in that misty dawn between the discovery of riches and the coming of civilization.

In the camp were a thousand men, the floating, reckless, freely spending breed which built the West and vanished into a nameless grave. They were not shrewd men, for all their native intelligence. Life was too roaring and real for subtleties. The shrewdness, the cunning and the guile of the predatory was left for those who followed the trail of the thousand, and who lived on their mighty labors.

Along with the dive-keepers and gamblers there had come to Hungry Horse the agitators. Grievances are never hard to find anywhere, and these alert individuals quickly found enough to set them up in business.

They were not the recognized organizers who have always been the tireless watchdogs of those who toil; they were the fly-by-night mischief makers who seek only a crisis wherein to sell out to the highest bidder. They were the sponsors of the mysterious Dark Brotherhood, which strove for power through the terror of its secret, night-marauding Dark Angels.

What had been a roaring camp was now a still one, with the unnatural quiet that precedes an explosion. All possibility of compromise was gone. Short of closing the mines, the operators could do nothing.

The situation was in the hands of

men who desired peaceful compromise least of all, since it would automatically abolish their power. They were able to resist the urgent attempts of recognized organizations of miners in other camps to arbitrate. They had the reckless thousand in their spell, and their purpose was close to fulfillment.

And at this point, with no other hope in sight, Dugan was called in, alone.

IT was no part of Dugan's task to allow his sympathies to become embroiled. He knew full well what justification the thousand possessed, and he knew, too, the insanity of trying to right their wrongs by anarchy. He knew they could wipe out the mines and their owners through sheer force of numbers, and he knew exactly how little good that would do them.

He was on the spot to prevent a terrible calamity where all normal methods had failed. His own methods were not beyond criticism at times, perhaps, but they had proved effective in other crises; they were callous and brutal, it may be, but they had saved countless of lives and prevented untold suffering. He knew what he wanted to do, knew the end was justified, and went about the task without a qualm.

Dugan's initiation into the Brotherhood was perfunctory. It was no time for ceremony. Some time after the meeting started upstairs, he was called and informed that he had been voted in. Murdock introduced him. The president of the Brotherhood shook hands with him. He was a tall, black-browed man with a booming, emotional voice, by name Borden.

He studied Dugan for a moment and Dugan returned his stare, and each knew the other to be a man not easily dismissed. Then Dugan was conducted to a back seat and left there, while in the hot, smoke-filled room a goodly number of the thousand argued and declaimed and voiced their wrongs. Blood and battle were brewing in the gulch, and the newcomer was left to himself. Which, for the present, was as he wished.

THE next day Dugan made many friends. The men accepted him willingly. He was never one to pass unnoticed anywhere, and he had a way of accosting in jovial fashion every slightest acquaintance. Estimating his strength, they counted him one of them. Drinking his liquor, they called him friend.

Of some he asked questions.

"The Widow Frane?" he was told. "Judith Frane? You've no chance there. There ain't a man in camp wouldn't move into one of her rooms to-morrow. And that though she's a shrewd one to bargain and no one at all to stand for her men coming in roaring drunk of nights. It's no common miner she wants in her house. And she's right. I'll stand by her as to that. She's too fine a woman."

Only fine? thought Dugan. The fools! Where were their eyes? He inquired who might her well-behaved boarders be.

"They're no different from any of us, for a fact. The company men stay close to the mill and the mines. And well they might. But the Widow Frane's boarders are steady men, saving men, and she keeps them by her."

Later he had these men pointed out to him, or such of them as could be found. And that evening he attached himself to one of them. The man was a tall, awkward-muscled Austrian who had no close friends, and who came to one of the bars each evening for a solitary drink before turning in to bed.

Dugan insisted on the man's accepting another drink.

"Dutchy," he said, "I got something to say to you. Something very confidential."

"So?" The man retreated behind a native stolidity.

"You bet. Come on; let's go outside. We'll have to get away from the crowd."

The miner saw no necessity for leaving the noisy, comfortable resort. But Dugan was compelling. He was friendly, smiling, but somewhat insistent. They went outside. They walked. And Dugan talked.

THEY were up the street a distance and entering the more shadowed part of the town beyond the resorts when the Austrian halted.

"Say, are you making fool of me?" he inquired. Dugan's talk made no sense to him at all.

"Why, Dutchy! The idea!"

"Why you bring me out here, eh? You got something to say to me?"

"Yes," said Dugan. "Dutchy, I've got some bad news for you. You're losing your happy home to-morrow."

"Me?"

"Nobody else. You're packing up and finding another boarding house, see. To-morrow."

"Who says this?"

"I do," said Dugan.

"To hell with you then," observed the miner. "Only Mrs. Frane can tell me to go oudt."

At that instant something enormous and powerful and shocking hit the Austrian, and he found himself flat on the ground, groggy and clutching at the earth for support. Dugan was standing above him.

"Sorry, but that saves time, Dutchy. It's only a sample. I'm telling you you're getting out of the widow's to-morrow, see. Are you going or do I give you some more of the same?"

The astounding fact dawned on the miner. Dugan had struck him. He came to his feet, catlike, and rushed. And as he came he bellowed outraged oaths in his native tongue.

It was a good fight, yet brief. They could see but indistinctly as they charged each other on the hard-packed earth of the path beyond the plank sidewalk. Above them the gulch loomed darkly. Near by the steel of the railroad tracks gleamed amid the shadows. About were somber shacks, deep dark, and silence. Behind them roared the night life of the camp, unaware. And unaware, they fought.

Several times the Austrian landed his mighty blows on the shifty body of Dugan. But many more times the solid, short punches of Dugan jolted the miner grievously. Dugan chuckled, deep in his throat. The Austrian gasped enraged curses. He was losing, and he knew it. And with a sudden burst of stars that filled the night completely he ceased to know even that.

Dugan was sitting comfortably near by, smoking a cigarette that glowed in the darkness, when the miner awakened. And only the cigarette moved as the miner sat up.

"Well, Dutchy—satisfied?"

"Ach! You—"

In a little gleaming arc the cigarette vanished in the night. Dugan stood above the beaten man.

"Do you mean that, Dutchy?"

The Austrian said no more.

DUGAN presented himself soon after supper time the next evening at the Widow Frane's. The house was one of the two dozen buildings which formed the center of the

town. It was one of a half dozen which had actual second stories. On one side was a hardware store and on the other a Chinese laundry.

There was an enigmatic look on the face of Judith Frane as she surveyed Dugan in the open door. Dugan was at his most presentable, shaved, shorn and wearing the single white shirt. His bundle was now contained in a new imitation leather bag.

"I've come to move into the vacant room," said Dugan.

The woman studied him.

"Who told you a room was vacant?"

"I heard. Somebody moved out to-day, didn't he?" He smiled a large smile, reassuringly.

"Yes, somebody moved out to-day."

"Well, here I am. You promised me the next vacancy."

"Did I, indeed?" inquired Judith. "I've been wondering just why Mr. Schmidt packed up so suddenly." Her eyes gleamed the least bit. "Have you any idea about that?"

"Not the least."

"Oh, I thought you might have heard that as well."

For a moment they stood eying each other, Dugan with the arrogance of unwasted strength in his deep shoulders and Judith Frane tall and colorful and full of robust health. A brave man and a fine woman.

"Well," said Dugan, "is it yes or no?"

"Oh, I suppose yes," she said. "Come in."

Dugan entered. He followed her up the stairs and into a small, clean room. He paid no attention to the room. His eyes were on her and he smiled. They discussed the price and agreed. He told her his name. She departed, and stopped again in the hall to turn about. He was in the doorway.

"Mr. Dugan. And what if I had said no to you then instead?"

"Well, maybe it would have been better at that."

Her brows raised.

"Yes? What do you mean?"

"I'd be here anyway. And think how much better friends we'd be by now."

Dugan heard her laugh for the first time. It was unforced, spontaneous. There was color in her cheeks. The little wrinkles gathered in the corners of Dugan's eyes.

"You and me, Mrs. Frane—we're bound to be good friends."

"Oh, and are we? My boarders are all my very good friends."

"Them? A lot of stiffs and roughnecks. You need a man."

There came a look in her eyes that glinted dangerously.

"That will be enough of that, Mr. Dugan. You'll find everything you need in your room. Good night!"

And she descended the stairs.

CHAPTER III.

CHALLENGES.

DURING the next few days Dugan saw little of Judith. It irritated him that she should be so elusive, but he could bide his time. These days gave little opportunity for anything but his work and his Brotherhood activities. And the latter engaged him constantly.

Dugan, after his initial dissatisfaction with the course the men were following, set to work deftly to speed it up. He succeeded. The materials of trouble were at hand, and it suited him to use them, to get at the crux of the matter more quickly. Meetings were nightly. Speeches of dissatisfaction,

faced with his quiet scorn, became demands on the leaders for rebellion.

The third meeting Dugan attended, he got to his feet and spoke. The fourth, he raised his voice and told them they were running a Sunday school class. At the end of the week he caught the rapt attention of the gathering at will, and almost ruled their decisions.

Almost! And there he drew up and went no further. The responsibility of trouble would not be his in the final reckoning. Dugan had his job to do. And in terse, detailed reports mailed discreetly to the agency, he did it.

Dugan, it must be noted, created no trouble. Such effort would be superfluous. It was his task to locate it, to study it. Where it was hidden and smoldering he unearthed it, and knew it for what it was. Where it was open and flaming, he merely stood by to be on hand when it got out of control. At the proper time he would act, in whatever manner the situation suggested, and his move would be quick and sure.

One night a miner rose in the room above the saloon and made a motion that brought the assembly to its feet. He proposed that Dugan be commissioned as one of the Dark Angels. The man spoke quietly, but the significance of the motion was not lost on the others. If the strike came, there would be violence. Violence is a reluctant weapon in the hands of many. But to some it would be a terrible, joyful weapon. So they figured it to be with Dugan. He would plan. And he would execute.

Dugan stood by the platform while the meeting stormed before him. There were many words, the cries of those who seconded the motion, of those who damned him who proposed it. There were fists shaken and curses uttered. Something sardonic in Dugan thrilled at it. But his face was hard and his eyes were like blue granite lined with thin, fine veins as he stood erect before them.

BORDEN, the president, thundered on the table with his gavel. Quiet came again. A man rose, was recognized, and formally seconded the motion. For a moment the storm threatened to break again. But an objector was in turn allowed to speak and they waited for his words.

"That man," he said, pointing at Dugan, "who is he? Tell me that, you who want him so badly. Where did he come from? Is he a miner or a company spy? Tell me that, any of you!"

This time only Dugan held them back. He took a step forward, his big hand demanding silence.

"I'll tell you! You've asked a question. No man ever asked such a question of me before. I never thought any one would be reckless enough to try. All right, I'll give you an answer."

"Answer him, Dugan!" roared a voice. "By God, give him a proper answer."

Dugan turned and gazed over the assembly till he found whom he sought.

"You, Murdock," he said, "tell me something. I've heard about a fellow named Cooper, a straw boss at the Magnet. I'm told he's crooked and a bully. What are the facts?"

"Those are the very facts," replied Murdock. Wrathy voices of affirmation rose about the hall. "We've tried to get him removed by peaceful means, but we can't prove anything. We only know. He has cheated his men, he has driven them, and he has slugged them. One miner tried to meet him

outside the workings and square matters man to man, and Cooper knifed him so he'll never get a job again. Among the things we're going to do by fair means or foul, so help me God, is to get Cooper for what he has done to honest miners in this town."

"By fair means or foul," roared a voice, "and the fouler the better."

Dugan again addressed the room.

"It looks to me like this Cooper is hunting trouble. And needing it. Well, I'll give it to him. You've all fallen down on the job. I won't. I'll take care of him, and then you'll know my answer to all your blasted questions."

THAT broke up the meeting. There was no attempt at a vote on the motion. The president, Borden, he of the booming, emotional voice, splintered his gavel unnoticed. He adjourned the session by the simple process of departing with his officers through the rear and down the stairs into the night.

There were sober faces next morning, in the mines and about the town. There was no talk.

All that day Dugan worked alone on a timber platform high in a crooked stope rising out of the five-hundred-foot level. His singlejack drove hole after hole in the refractory quartz. And, hour after hour, the day passed and the man who knew wondered how his answer would be given.

Men, passing below, looked up at him with veiled glances. Once the superintendent of the mine stood watching him for several minutes. Dugan, eying him, wondered if the man had been informed of the arrival of an investigator. Dugan worked alone, responsible only to his superiors at the agency, and he saw no reason to court betrayal by admitting his identity to any one.

The day passed. Night came, and the men gathered in the resorts. Dugan was not to be seen in any of them, though they looked. There was no meeting in the room over the saloon. Hungry Horse was waiting.

Dugan was at home this evening. He sat in the parlor of the widow's house. He was smoking a cigar. He occupied a big plush chair and rattled a newspaper. He did not read it. His eyes had followed the widow as she cleaned up the table in the dining room, visible through the door between. His eyes had remained on the kitchen door beyond when she had set all to rights in the dining room, and had retired to wash the dishes. He waited.

When she emerged again, her apron was gone, little spots of heightened color were in her cheeks, and faint moisture gleamed on the invisible down of her upper lip. She ignored Dugan. From a sewing table in the parlor she took a small bundle of blue gingham. She carried this into the dining room, and presently sat sewing on the cloth under the oil lamp which adorned the table.

Dugan watched her. He knew, by the one infallible intuition which such as he always possess, that she was aware of him. Sitting there under the soft light, her eyes on the cloth through which the needle shuttled swiftly, she felt his presence. Quiet it was in those rooms. Only the paper rustled momentarily. Yet an impalpable conflict went on between them, with antipathy, with attraction. And each wondered how it would come out.

DUGAN rose. He stood in the doorway.

"Mrs. Frane."

"Yes?"

He stood there a moment. Wasn't

she the cold one, though! But no, she wasn't. He knew.

"Judith."

She looked up.

"That's a liberty, Mr. Dugan."

"I know it's a liberty."

"Well?"

The wrinkles gathered in the corners of his eyes.

"That's not the same as telling me I can't call you Judith."

"Did I say you could?"

"I'm not the man to wait for you to tell me," he said.

"And what is it you're taking so long to say to me, Mr. Dugan?"

"You're all questions to-night, aren't you?"

Ire stirred her.

"Well, I might be, indeed! What are you doing here at this hour? How is it you're not out with the rest of the men?"

"You're all questions to-night," he repeated. "And you know what the answer is to every one of them."

She sewed, her gaze on the needle.

"Go ahead; fight me, Judith. That's what I want, perhaps. Only take care you don't fight me too hard."

"You're a sure one, all right. A mighty cool one, too."

"Sure, maybe. Not so cool."

"Well, I'm one that is." She stood up. "Will you leave here, Mr. Dugan! Right this minute!"

For a space they gazed at each other. Dugan stepped into the room. One step. Mrs. Frane had long, pointed shears in her hand, and there were sparks of fire in her eyes.

Dugan chuckled, softly, in his chest.

"All right. I can wait. In your own good time, Judith. In your own good time."

"Good night, Mr. Dugan."

Then he had her wrist by his strong hand, and was holding the shears impotent in her grasp. He smiled in her eyes.

"I'm a patient man, Judith. Don't look at me like that. I'm a patient man, but don't fight too hard. I'll win anyway. Understand? I'll win. And you're going to be glad that I did."

The two spots of color were bright on her cheeks. Something of apprehension passed like a shadow over her eyes. Not fear of him, though. She stood erect, against his assurance, braving it, defying it.

Dugan stepped back, releasing her hand. Quite deliberately, as one whose power it is to bestow benefice, he let her go. In the doorway he made a slight bow. It was not a courtly bow. It was the tribute of a man of strength and arrogance, an untutored gesture of admiration.

"Good night, Judith."

He was gone. She sat in her chair. Her breath, as though suddenly released, came quickly. She commenced sewing again, with deliberate and uncertain stitches.

CHAPTER IV.

CONFLICT.

DUGAN returned home very late that night. He went quietly to bed, and rose for work at the usual time in the morning. Until noon he worked alone in his corner of the narrow stope. No one came near him.

He ate lunch with several other miners in the cross-cut below. They talked of men and far-away things, and made no mention of the thoughts that were uppermost in their minds. The candles they wore on their caps flickered in the draft that came from the main shaft. Water dripped steadily some-

where in the near-by darkness. They ate their food slowly, soberly. And then came their way an excited youngster who had been up for sharpened drills. He bore news.

"They found him early this morning, somewheres up the creek," he explained, wide-eyed. "He was still unconscious. Somebody waylaid him and beat him something terrible. It's them Dark Angels. They beat him all to hell."

"Cooper, the straw boss?" he was asked. "You sure? Cooper of the Magnet?"

"Sure it was him. Everybody's talking about it."

"Do they know who done it?"

"None of them knows. Cooper himself can't tell. I don't know how it happened. That's just what I heard. He was all bloody and unconscious when they found him. Beaten all to hell."

Dugan listened, chewing stolidly on his food. None of them looked his way.

The youngster hurried on along the dark tunnel to carry his news to other gangs.

"Well, he had it coming," said one.

"Aye, he had it coming."

"He must have," agreed Dugan.

THAT bit of news traveled through the drifts and levels of every mine in the gulch. It ran through the shacks and offices of the company men, to the superintendents, the engineers, the timekeeprs. It was retailed above the thunder of the stamps in the mills. It was told that night at supper tables all along the creek. Its fabric altered and grew as it spread, and it turned up in places as a tale of something close to murder, as such will. And if many shrank from its portent, they clenched damp palms and said that, by the Almighty, he had it coming!

Dugan moved quickly that evening and was in the dining room before any of the others were down. The widow was setting the table. The china was pale blue and white on the faded red-figured cloth. He spoke, and she gave him replies that held no hint of what had happened between them the night before.

"Is there to be a strike then?" she asked him. Knives and forks clattered in her hand.

"You heard what happened last night?"

"Yes."

"Well, you know what that means."

"Who did it?"

He watched her. Did she know? He smiled.

"You know who did it, Judith."

Their eyes met.

"I suppose I do," she said. "He was waylaid in the dark. It was a cowardly trick."

Dugan tossed a knife on the table, a bone-handled weapon with a broad seven-inch blade and a cruel point. She did not touch it.

"He lost that," said Dugan. "He must have thought a lot of it. He wanted badly to use it."

She started for the kitchen door. He moved and halted her, his hands on her shoulders.

"There's no man can stand up to me, Judith. Nor any woman." The small wrinkles were on his eyes and his lips smiled.

"Go away," she said. "Leave me—"

He kissed her. For an instant he felt her warm mouth. Then he was thrown back with a force that was unexpected. They stood a few paces apart.

"You stay away from me, Dugan, or I'll kill you. I certainly want nothing from a bully and a coward."

Dugan's smile was slightly crooked. God, what a magnificent woman! He made a tentative move. They heard a step descending the stairs out in the hall. She went quickly through to the kitchen. For a moment Dugan stared at the door. Then his shoulders shrugged and he walked into the parlor.

"Hullo, Dugan," said the newcomer. He was a stolid Cornishman.

"Hello, yourself," said Dugan. "Hungry to-night?"

THEY elected Dugan that night to the Dark Angels without a dissenting vote. If there were those who remained skeptical, they said nothing. The meeting was quiet. The men who spoke were brief, and their voices were pitched lower. They dallied with trifling matters. Dire things were coming, and in their desperation they were afraid.

It was Murdock who broached the matter. If a strike was unavoidable, they must prepare for it. The companies would call in armed men, professional gunmen. There would be clashes. Try as they might, blood would be shed. It was up to the men either to make the strike quick and decisive, or to endure starvation while strike-breakers filled their jobs under the protection of guards.

Murdock stood erect by his chair in the fore of the meeting. His big hands gripped the back of the chair ahead. His body barely moved as he spoke. He spoke earnestly, with the sincerity of a simple man. Every face present turned his way, and each face was impassive, listening.

"They've given us no other choice. They've refused us everything we asked. They're dared us to do anything. They're strong and they know it. Stronger than us, maybe. But they're not stronger that fear. Fear is our weapon. Make them know how we can ruin them. Make them dread that their mines and mills and their lives may be taken from them. We'll gain nothing by that, no; but they'll gain less. We're desperate. We can do it. We will do it, before we'll surrender. They must be made to know we will. And the means is in our hands. *Dynamite!*"

It seemed a shiver ran through the room. The word was terrible to these men. They knew what it could do. They knew what it would do, not only to the mines and mills, but to themselves.

"Dugan," said Murdock, turning to him. "We'll not mince matters. You're the man for us. You proved it. May God help you, it's a job with blood and suffering on it that we're giving you. But we're counting on you now."

"Well, keep right on counting," said Dugan. He got to his feet.

Unsmilingly he looked in their eyes. His hands moved. There was a sound, as if a stick had splintered.

The barrel of the Smith and Wesson .45, which had not yet seen the light of day in Hungry Horse heretofore, rested on the back of the chair it had struck so viciously. It was there for all to see. A grand stand play. And Dugan knew when to make one.

"It's time you woke up," said Dugan. "I'm ready for this. You talk of company gunmen. Well, I'm a gunman, too. They can't hire anybody harder than I am. I was born hard. I was raised hard. And nobody has changed me any, for all that tried."

They listened, and they believed him.

"And now," he said, "what's this job you're talking about?"

And believing him, they told him.

DURING the next week Dugan had much to do. He was given complete charge of an ingenious scheme. The great company mill was across the creek from the town, resting at the foot of the steep cañon wall. High up this wall to a natural reservoir near the top led a penstock, a conduit for the water used in the ore reduction processes.

It would be possible to drop a box of dynamite with lighted fuse into this penstock. The box would toboggan down the conduit into the interior of the mill, and would demolish the structure with a mighty explosion. And the company, for all the guards surrounding the building, would never know how it happened. The dynamiters would be enabled to make their way back to town by a roundabout way and not once be in danger.

There were other schemes, too, but that was the most effective attack planned on property. For it, and for the others which might follow, a store of dynamite was smuggled into the country. Dugan, with the aid of a trio of volunteers, received it at night from the Brotherhood's agent. The man had freighted it over the mountains on pack mules. The small boxes of explosive were cached in a deserted prospector's shack up along the ridge near the penstock opening. There it would be safe.

"How soon do you expect to use it?" Dugan asked Murdock. For all that Dugan had been vindicated and elected to the committee, there were secrets within secrets.

"Soon," said Murdock. "Unless the company gives in to us."

"And will they?"

"The hell they will!"

"The hell they won't," said Dugan, "when we put that stuff to work."

JUDITH FRANE had cause to be aware that Dugan's interests were many and mysterious. He went to work each day, and was out of the house many nights until almost dawn. Yet he found time to be alone in her presence.

Something trembled within Judith when he came into the house. There was strength to her, but he had the power of draining it as he stared at her through eyes which wrinkled at the corners. She hated him. Then again she forgot hating him for that trembling deep inside which was so unlike her.

Watching him when he was not looking, as he sat reading the paper or eating at table, his large hands fascinated her. When he found her alone and came near, she moved quickly and avoided his hands. And when he went out of the house, always closing the door so firmly behind him, she wanted to follow and cry her anger after him down the street. But with the passing of an interval she would find herself waiting to identify his step as he entered the house.

Another activity of Dugan's mystified Judith. He spent periods in his room for which she could not account. Despite the fact that he spent half the night away, she knew these periods were not utilized for rest. Cleaning up the room, she observed the numerous butts of cigarettes in the saucer on his small table. Eventually she noted, too, scattered dots of ink on the cover of the table. Dugan, then, was writing. But to whom?

Once it had occurred to Judith that Dugan's nocturnal absences might have

been explained by his interest in some other woman. He had given her reason to suspect him. And she was angry at herself for the instinctive resentment that followed the thought. It was no business of hers, indeed.

Dugan came home one night after midnight. The town was quiet, even the resorts were subdued, for it was mid-week. All the widow's boarders were in bed. Judith was in the kitchen, the ironing board on the table and clean, smooth clothes piled near by, when Dugan entered the room. He surveyed the result of her industry.

"You're working late to-night, Judith."

"Yes. I want to finish before I go to bed."

"Did you have to?"

She pressed hard with the iron on the pillow case before her.

"Of course. I never leave things undone."

He smiled. He was not fooled. And she knew, and again that trembling came inside her.

"Just like me, Judith, girl. Never leave things undone."

"What do you mean?"

Oh, why had she asked that? He was at her side. His large hands held her arms, held her whole body still.

"That's something I guess I don't have to explain. No more do you need explain why you're here now. You never worked at this hour before—Judith, I told you when I came here you couldn't fight me."

He kissed her. Exultation rose heady to his brain. For Judith submitted, still in his arms, her shadowed eyelids closed.

It was a moment Dugan had awaited for patient hours and days. Only a moment it was, to be sure, but Dugan did not mind. When she came to protesting life and shrank from him, pushing him away, he lowered his arms. Her red lips were drawn, trembling, and her eyes were wide. Her breath came fast.

Oh, no, he did not mind! He, Dugan, was a master of women. But something fierce and hot gripped his vitals, and for once he knew what it was to tremble. His hands clenched. They stood so, looking at each other.

"You can't stay here," she said. "You've got to go. Oh, you mustn't stay here!"

For a moment he made no reply. She wondered what went on back of those eyes, hiding behind lids which gathered so. What would he do?

He breathed deeply and searched in his pockets for a cigarette. A match flicked into flame. He inhaled once.

"No, Judith." He was smiling again. "I'm staying. I'm sticking around till you're all through fighting it out."

"No, I won't let you!"

He was at the door.

"I'll be here, Judith. Don't worry. I'll be here. Good night."

She stood after he had gone with something fierce beating against her heart. Oh, what a fool! He was right. He knew instantly why she had delayed the day long so that her work remained to be finished at midnight.

Why hadn't he done something? If he had persisted, if he had forced himself further upon her, she would have been able to hate him. She would have been strong with rage. She would have driven him from the house. She could have threatened to cry out, to call for aid. And one little cry would have aroused the camp. The camp was hard, but harder still would be the fate of any man who molested the Widow Frane.

Wise indeed in the ways of the world and of love was Dugan.

CHAPTER V.

TREACHERY.

THE work Dugan performed each day in the mine was a tedious business. Yet he drew on his endless patience to support him, and no matter how little he slept, he was faithfully on the job each morning. He found himself assigned to solitary tasks in drifts and stopes where the vein ran thin, and where walls of barren porphyry closed in and made difficult his labors.

If the bosses deliberately gave him these onerous tasks because he had become a known trouble-maker, that only raised his standing the higher with the men. And the higher his standing with the men the closer he would be to the secrets of the inner council.

Dugan became aware the next afternoon of a curious feeling of uneasiness. He believed in hunches, and wondered. Something was wrong. The men he encountered at noontime, and on the two occasions he made his way out to the shaft, spoke to him in the casual manner of heretofore. Yet he caught from them an impalpable sense of danger. He took heed of this, but was at a loss for what might be its portent.

After he had set a dozen charges of dynamite in the drill holes shortly before quitting time, he departed, leaving behind as many hissing fuses to spit fire in the darkness. He rose to the shaft head in the hoist in company with the usual crowd of grimy miners going off shift. He watched them, alert for some betrayal. There was none. Yet they walked down the hill apart from him, and he knew they had deliberately chosen to avoid him.

Dugan followed, striding alone in heavy boots. He crossed the creek bridge after them, proceeded up the street and went directly home. For the first time since he had come to Hungry Horse, no jovial invitation to take a drink had come from his comrades of the Dark Brotherhood.

Dugan washed and dressed without seeing Judith. When he had combed his reddish-brown hair into place, he sat down and took from his locked valise a leather envelope. This contained his papers. It also contained his final and unfinished report, which he would send to the agency when the time was ripe for final action. The moment was very near, if indeed it had not already come.

Then Dugan held the envelope motionless. His jaw contracted. The report was not among the papers in his hand. Last night he had placed it there. Some time since it had been abstracted. Some one had read it. And the narrative it contained was damning, utterly damning. It was a résumé of all he had done, of all he knew, and appended was an incomplete list of the names of those who bore the preponderance of guilt.

Dugan went to the table drawer to get his revolver. It would not be surprising if it, too, was gone. But it was in the drawer, as he always left it during the day. And beneath was the report.

A sour smile crossed Dugan's face. And then it went. His hands had not placed this treacherous paper there. There was still a second person involved. But who?

Judith Frane!

Dugan went downstairs. He went seeking a possible answer to the ques-

tion that had plagued him all afternoon. It was an unpleasant answer, but he must face it if it were true. Judith had in all likelihood found the report lying on the table that morning. Dugan realized now that he had forgotten it was not safely locked in his valise, and had left it there.

Then Judith had probably hurried with the news to the Brotherhood officials. And the word had spread all through the mines within a couple of hours. And further, they awaited only to get him alone among themselves to exact their vengeance. It all seemed very logical by all he knew of the loyalty, however misapplied, of mining folk.

Dugan had been in danger many times before. After a fashion he throve on it, else he would never have continued to pursue his profession. Fear touched him but lightly. Yet he was no fool. If what he surmised should be true, his chances of getting out of that house alive to-night were few. And coming down the stairs he grinned to himself, and the little wrinkles of appreciation gathered in his eyes.

WITHIN the kitchen a couple of the men were bathing, using the wooden tubs placed for them in the center of the floor. Dugan found Judith by going out the side door from the dining room into the yard. She was sitting on a chair in the rear of the house, peeling apples. He eyed her, watching closely for what he felt she must betray.

"Hello, Judith."

She continued to peel the apple in her hand. The knife hesitated, but it went on. She did not speak.

"Well, Judith, I'm waiting. Get it off your chest."

"I have nothing to say."

"Yes, you have."

"No. Nothing. Go away."

"Not yet. Not by a damn sight. Come on. Who have you told?"

He had to wait a moment for his answer. And then it was but a silent shaking of that averted head in denial.

"Nobody?" he asked.

Dugan waited a moment. Then he touched her, lifted her face with his hand to look into her eyes. She submitted. For a second it had seemed that hatred stirred in the gray-green pupils, and then a bright film obscured it, buried it deep. Dugan released her chin.

"No, I guess you didn't." He sat on the doorstep alongside. "I'd like to know why."

"Oh, will you please go," she cried. "I can't stand you now."

"Listen, Judith—" he began.

"I won't listen. It was bad enough for you to follow me and hound me. What you were planning to do with me was bad enough. But to be a traitor to—"

His hand muffled the words in her mouth. He stood above her.

"Stop that. Don't you say that out loud again. There are men in that kitchen."

"Oh!" she said blankly when he took his hand away. She stared at the door, apprehension in her eyes.

"They didn't hear it," said Dugan. "But a little more and they would."

There was no more pride in Judith Frane. Where had it gone? she cried out within herself. To harbor a traitor, to hide his secret, to dread for his peril! She, who would have gone instantly to the men with the news had this happened a month ago. She knew little of their secret plans or graver problems, but she was kin with them.

She wanted to go, a terrible resentment urged her to disclose this wolf in her fold. And she couldn't. She could not betray Dugan. They would kill him. They would take him from her house and do him to death at the stake.

Her heart shrank within her. Oh, God! She couldn't do that to him!

They were alone. High board fences separated the back yard from those adjoining. Dugan dropped to his knees. His arms held her.

"I was right, Judith, wasn't I? No use fighting me, was there? Tell me you love me, Judith."

Her shoulders quivered. Her face was hidden in her hands. Then she came to her feet, and the apples fell and rolled over the grass.

"Now you will have to go," she said. "I didn't have the strength to send you. I tried. Now you'll have to. I can tell them now."

"But you won't."

"Yes, I will. Oh, and I will."

"No. You couldn't. Do you want to know why? I'd never escape this camp alive if you told. They'd gang me and put a rope on me and drag me up the street. They'd kick my face and break me. They'd drop me over the railroad trestle with a noose around my neck. They'd shoot at my dead body till the rope broke beneath its weight."

"Oh! Don't!"

Again he caught her. Sound and strong was her frame, but it quivered in his hold.

"So you won't tell on me, now or ever. You're mine. Understand?"

They stood so for many minutes. A sound of water splashing came from the next yard. They moved, startled. From a rear window of the laundry leaned a Chinaman with a tin basin. He stared at them curiously.

Judith Frane fled around the corner of the house and was gone.

SUPPER was eaten in silence. Dugan studied the others at table, watchful for the secret little signs by which men betray their thoughts. He looked at their hands, their eyelids, their stolid mouths. He believed Judith. But something was afoot that held menace for him.

Dugan was finishing his coffee when Murdock arrived. Murdock did not knock. He simply entered the house, and announced his visit by thrusting his head in the dining room door. Locating Dugan, he called:

"Dugan. I'll be up in your room. Come up when you're through."

Dugan kept him waiting a few minutes. The report was again safely locked up. The revolver was now thrust down his belt. To keep the other fellow waiting, Dugan knew, was good strategy.

When he walked into the room upstairs, Murdock was standing by the window. He was in brooding thought. He swung about. For a moment they stood without speaking.

"Dugan, something's happened," said Murdock.

"Yes, so I notice. Let me in on it."

"Don't you know what it is?"

"I don't."

Murdock stared. Then he came close. He kept his voice low, but he spoke with passion.

"May your eternal soul be damned if you're lying. I brought you into this. I stand to get the same as you if anything happens."

"Sure. What's likely to happen?"

"The dynamite cache was raided!"

Sincerely, indeed, Dugan was appalled. The company had moved. The fools! The blasted, meddling fools!

Acting on the information in his previous report, they had prematurely confiscated the store of explosives. They had warned the conspirators. They had discredited Dugan. They had hamstrung him!

"When was this, Murdock?"

"Dugan, if you had a hand in it—"

"Leave off that! Is it likely? Tell me what happened."

Murdock told him. One of the angels, making a visit of inspection to the little shack up the cañonside early that morning, had found the place stripped bare. There was no clew to the identity of those who had looted the shack. But on Dugan, the stranger, the man responsible for the cache, fell all suspicion.

"How about yourself, Murdock. Do you think I did it?"

"Hell, I don't know what to think."

"Well, why should I? Do you know a single reason?"

"Reasons? Plenty of them! The Brotherhood is probably rotten with company spies. Man, are you trying to pull the wool over my eyes?"

"Listen here, Murdock," said Dugan, "you're the first one to tell me about this. I'm in bad. I know that. But you're not going to get far by throwing it up to me. Plenty others to do that. If you want to catch the skunk that did this, you've got to work with me."

Murdock paced the room.

"Yes, and I've learned that. You and me are painted with the same tar stick."

The little wrinkles crept back into Dugan's eyes.

"Don't let them stampede you, Murdock."

"Well, what are you going to do then?"

Dugan chuckled humorlessly.

"I'm going to find the snake that did this! And nail him to the wall."

Murdock looked at him, the spark of desperate hope igniting in his eyes.

THERE was a trace of a grin of great relish on Dugan's face as they walked up the street together. Dugan was a fatalist, who did not believe in defeat. He could perceive, in the silence that greeted them, in the morbid, curious glances cast their way by neutrals and those uninitiated, that the whole camp was aware he was a marked man. Few of them, indeed, knew why. But they knew that much, with the instinct for drama that the gold camps bred in them.

On their entry in the Nugget, a tension fell on the crowded barroom. There was a pause in the flow of talk, and an immediate resurging of men's voices nervously attempting to cover up the betrayal. Dugan, with Murdock following, strode across the room and through the door that opened on the stairs. They mounted to the meeting room above, and behind them came a mass of men who had only been awaiting their arrival.

It began quietly. Borden, the president, went straight to the point. He called on the man who had discovered the rifled cache to tell his story. While the latter narrated the events of his visit to the shack, each stolid face looked his way. He spoke boldly, making no comment, giving the facts as he found them.

Borden rose again and spoke in his booming voice. He used the word "traitor," and a shiver of apprehension ran through the stillness of the room. He recalled to them other times when faithless comrades had sold out and bitter causes had been lost. He talked with venom. They listened.

And they kept their eyes away from Dugan.

At last Murdock was given the floor. He had been impatiently awaiting his chance, his hard mouth drawn thin on his face. Now he fixed his gaze on them.

"There's a traitor here, all right," he said. "May he rot in hell eternal; there's a man among us who has sold us out to the company. Before we can do a thing more, we have to find him. And before we deal with him then, we have to make certain we've got the right one. For if we pick the wrong man, we have only covered a traitor's dirty trail the deeper! You men have come here to-night with one man's name in your minds. You have shut your minds against any other name. You have sworn to try him in meeting —and never give him a chance to prove his case. Your verdict is already made. Well, he's here. He knows what he might have to face, but he came anyway. He ain't afraid of you. What he wants is what I demand! A fair investigation and the proven guilt of the skunk among us."

"Sit down, Murdock," came a menacing voice. "You're in this too deep yourself. You brought him here."

"I did that!" roared Murdock passionately. "And if you prove him, or anybody else, guilty to my satisfaction, I'll take him myself down the creek and put a bullet in his heart!"

A miner leaped to his feet.

"We'll see to that, Murdock. It won't be a bullet, either. There's a rope in this room to-night, and by the eternal, we're going to use it!"

"Not while I'm here to stop you!" cried Murdock.

And with that the meeting boiled over.

Four men rushed Murdock. They knocked him off his feet and held him, threshing on the floor. Directly behind him Dugan had been seated, and other hands sought to lay hold of him, But they paused, hesitated, and drew back, desperately seeking to restrain the impetuous rush of those behind.

For Dugan, grinning a cruel grin, stood against the wall, and menacing them was the bleak muzzle of the forty-five.

"Back, you rats! Back, or I'll blow your heads off! Don't talk. Get! There'll be no lynching here to-night."

Some one in the rear of the shouting, cursing, frightened pack of men threw a chair. Dugan hunched his head and shoulders as it crashed upon him. A wild yell rose. It was cut short by the hollow report of Dugan's gun as he fired above their heads. He fired once again, and panic seized them.

Another gun spoke now, and Dugan heard the glass in a window farther along the wall shiver to fragments as the lead that missed him hit it at a tangent. He turned, fired point-blank at those who were between him and the rear of the hall, and rushed them. They cleared from his path. Quite deliberately he had failed to hit them, but they did not know that.

He pulled open the rear door, giving on the outside stairs, and was gone into the darkness of the night. Behind him heavy powder smoke swirled slowly across the room in a greasy haze.

CHAPTER VI.

A MARKED MAN.

JUDITH had dealt with many men, had made a place for herself in a world of men, and she thought she knew them. She denied all of them any claim upon her; all but Dugan,

that is, who brooked no denial. And since those others sought nothing of her, they gave her the respect born of the chivalrous tradition, which is a thing false and deceptive.

Judith had never encountered men who looked upon her as an obstacle to their masculine desires, rather than the object of them. The latter she could understand. But the mood of those men who called her to her door this night was foreign to her experience.

They stood on the sidewalk, the light from the hall lamp yellow on their faces. Though they merely stood there, awaiting her invitation to enter, they bore an air of unswerving purpose. Judith felt its quiet force.

"Good evening," she replied to their greeting. "Do you—will you come in?"

"Yes, thank you, ma'am."

They filed into the parlor after her. There they stood, hats in hand, while one addressed her.

"We've come on a special errand, Mrs. Frane."

"Yes? Will you take seats?"

"Thank you, no," said the spokesman. He was a heavy, gnarled man, on whom the errand had vested a certain dignity. "We're sorry, ma'am, but this may be an unpleasant visit. We're a committee from the miners' organization. I'm not able to explain exactly, but—will you please show us the room used by Dugan?"

Something cold touched Judith. "Oh! But I can hardly do that. Mr. Dugan will be back."

"In due time. But not now. We must visit his room now."

"I'm very sorry. Mr. Dugan is a guest in this house. I can't let you go there."

Judith expected to see a look of bafflement, perhaps of irritation, appear on the man's face. There appeared neither.

"Then I'm sorry, Mrs. Frane. We're going anyway."

He turned to the silent men, and on a plan obviously prearranged, they moved. One took a position at the rear door, another at the hall entrance. A third moved near the window. Judith was guarded from any escape.

"No one will offer you harm, Mrs. Frane. And we'll leave your house the instant we have done what we came here for. Come on, men."

They left the room and mounted the stairs.

Judith could hear them up there. They worked in silence, but she knew what they were doing. They were making a thorough search of Dugan's effects, and, by the sounds, of the room itself. They moved the bed, shifted the dresser. They broke something. The lock on the valise, she guessed. And presently they came down the stairs again with slow footsteps that beat upon her heart. Standing motionless beside the parlor table, she watched them enter the room. She saw the papers in the spokesman's hand. Somehow everything inside her went numb.

"Thank you, ma'am, for taking it so quietly," said the man. "We found what we were looking for."

"What were you looking for?"

"I don't like to talk about it, Mrs. Frane. You'll learn to-morrow."

THEY turned to depart, respectful, saying no more, but with a new hardness on them. Even those who had remained below needed no message to confirm their thoughts. Judith, erect, looking at them as they thought any woman of offended pride but uncommon good sense would look, was, within her, stricken.

"Oh—please!" she said. "Tell me, where is Dugan now?"

The leader was outside. The others crowded after. Judith touched the sleeve of the last man. He looked embarrassed, but his obstinate gaze met hers directly as he shook his head.

"Tell me," she repeated.

And his gaze dropped. "He's at meeting," said the man, and went on out of the house.

Judith needed no more than that. She knew men to that extent, knew them well. It would be no meeting. It would be a trial. It would be a fair trial, before a jury of his peers, and justice would be done. Justice according to their lights. Justice to a traitor!

Judith uttered the word aloud, and found torment in the sound of it. She thought of him, at bay before a cruel, merciless roomful of men. She thought of his strength and his courage, and of the defiant, ruthless smile that would come on his face when they confronted him with his treachery. And she loved him.

The admission came as a terrible angel. It held ecstasy in one hand and cruelty untold in the other. Standing alone, she covered her face with her hands as though to shut out the sight.

And then she turned quickly and listened. She moved to the dining room, and opened the kitchen door. The kitchen was dark. A band of lamplight cut through the darkness across the room. And standing in it, just inside the rear door, stood Dugan. In his right hand was a gun. On his face was a trickle of blood, and he was looking at her.

"Oh, my God!" she said. "You're here!"

He smiled, with the fine wrinkles about his hot eyes.

"Yes," he said. "I'm here."

He crossed the room and took her in his arms.

"In five minutes I guess the rest of the gulch will be here too," he told her.

Tightly she clutched him, and from deep within her breast a low moan escaped. On his jaw the little muscles stood out tensely, and he smiled with a baring of teeth. Then he kissed her.

THEY did not understand, but that night no one molested them. They were left alone. Through the long dark hours they waited. Together they sat, expecting with each moment the coming of those who would take Dugan away and do with him as had been planned. Not one of the men who were Judith's boarders entered the house to sleep in his room. None would have dared.

Dugan laughed at her fears. It was a curious laugh, that of one who never had learned fear and yet had come to recognize the imminence of death. And death it was that walked the windy streets of Hungry Horse that long night, lurking in the shadows and chilling the souls of every one who knew of the betrayal. And, as is the way in gold camps, by dawn there was no one who did not know.

Yet Dugan laughed.

Day came, slowly. The light of a new day, delayed by the high walls of the cañon, made a gray, ghostly town of Hungry Horse, and presently touched its harshness with the golden colors of the early sun. The streets were empty. Afar, at the shaft heads and at the great, ugly mill, steam began to generate and hiss impatience to start the day. And there was none to answer the call. The camp rested still and unnatural in the sharp daylight. All who watched through curtained windows knew. The strike had begun.

They cooked breakfast and ate, the two of them alone, waiting. There was nothing else to do. They knew that they could not go out. They knew that with the passions that ran through the town like sudden, terrible fevers, they would not go far. The vengeful hatred of the men of the Brotherhood was not abated. It waited behind closed doors and watchful windows, biding its time. There was nothing left to abate it.

The strike had begun!

They talked, as they waited through that long day. There was much to talk about, after these weeks. Pride had vanished; pride now was a curious and unreal part of a time that could be no more. How could one recognize pride in the shadow of fear?

And Dugan laughed!

"Oh, my dearest," cried Judith, "don't! I can't bear it. Oh, how can you? It tears my heart!"

"Yes? That's not half what's going to happen to me if they get hold of me, Judith."

"I know. I can't help knowing. Oh, why did you do such a thing?"

"Well, maybe right now I wish I hadn't. But I never waste time being sorry for things."

"No. But how about me?"

They stood together, she in his arms. He looked in her eyes.

"What are you sorry for? Are you sorry I came here?"

"Yes!" she cried passionately. And she added, "No, I'm not. I can't be. Oh, I hate you for what you've done. Right now I wish for a minute I had never seen you. And then I can't—I can't."

"Why?"

"You know why."

"You love me, Judith?"

"Of course!"

"Say it."

"I love you. Oh, I do. And that's all you want of me."

He did not smile now.

"Sometimes I thought so. But I'm afraid that's not true."

"Don't lie to me! I know you."

He left her. He dropped his arms, and went to the window, to stare out into the still day.

"You can't lie to me!" she cried to him.

He turned about. He came back to her.

"Do you know how true that is? Do you, Judith?"

She gazed into his eyes.

"True? What do you know about truth? You!"

And Dugan realized, for the first time in his life, that the hardest man in the world had a vulnerable spot. And how vulnerable, no one but Dugan could tell.

THROUGH the hours they lived that day in the silent house. For all his armor, Dugan found it none too easy to endure. The next move was not up to him. Never had he worried about the future at any time, nor did he now. But the present was too unnatural and still for him to draw any reassurance from its peace. He was a man of action, and his patience was that of such a man. It could weather turmoil and opposition, but not a prolonged, ominous calm such as this.

Once, looking through the window curtains, he observed two men passing along the street on the sidewalk across the railroad track. He eyed them as they went on and out of sight. They were men he had seen night after night at the Nugget. They were miners. And on two previous occasions in the last

hour Dugan had seen them go by the house in a similar manner. He set himself to watch for their appearance.

Not many minutes later they returned. They walked without talking, without bearing any indication of their errand, and not once did either so much as glance toward the window where Dugan sat, concealed behind the curtains. Yet he knew now why they passed and repassed so.

Already they had a picket on him to see that he did not escape. He knew far too much for them to let him go. Since they had captured his final, complete report to the agency, they surmised that not yet had their plans been disclosed to their enemies. If they could prevent Dugan from making his way out of the camp, they could block a full disclosure. And as for their manner of preventing his departure, when the darkness of night fell on the town, Dugan would learn.

Dugan smiled. It was a cold, wintry smile.

He felt the presence of Judith behind him as he sat by the window. He did not look up, but he knew she followed his gaze.

"Who are they?" she asked.

"My keepers."

"They're watching you. They won't let you leave the house."

"Exactly."

"You'll have to leave. You simply can't stay here another day."

"No? And why not?"

Her hand fell lightly on his shoulder.

"Oh, don't talk that way; please don't talk that way! You know that anything can happen if you stay here."

He shrugged his bent shoulders and took hold of the hand.

"You're right. But I'm not going until you come with me. They won't do anything to me. They're not organized for action yet. Maybe later—"

"No, they're not organized! Why, you've given them something to fight at last. You're not as clever as you think. Every last man of them is hating you with all his heart right this minute, and if they're afraid of the companies they're not afraid of you."

"Aren't they? Well! Just you ask any one of them."

"Oh, by themselves they're afraid," she told him, "but they're hunting in a pack now, and they'll tear you down in a second once they get hold of you. How can a hundred men be afraid of one?"

He made no reply. For several minutes they remained so, still and watching. Then Judith spoke again.

"Tell me, how did you come to do all this?"

"All this what?"

"This dreadful spying on men who are fighting for their very living."

He glanced at her, studying her face.

"Do you believe that?"

"Certainly. Look at them. A lot of simple men who squander their young years at hard labor, living in shacks, taking the only joy of life they can know in drinking and carousing in low dives. They're honest and sincere, and if they are hard men, they aren't all to blame for it. I've known them. My husband was a miner. He was killed, crushed in a rock slip—"

THOUGHT furrowed Dugan's brow.

"I'm a hard man myself," he said. "I've my own life to live. How other men live theirs matters little to me. But don't forget that my job is something that's got to be done. It's a thankless job, and men call it a dirty one, but without it this world would be

a crazy place. Do you call it wrong to stop the dynamiting of the mill and the murder of whoever might have been inside it?"

"No," she admitted. "It would have been a terrible thing. But they would never have gone through with it."

"Oh, no? Your fine honest men were thirsting for blood, let me tell you. And the men who led them on, what about them?"

"What's wrong with them?"

"They're crooks to the soles of their shoes! They pose as miners, but they're politicians, every one, and there's not a politician alive that's honest."

"You don't know these men!"

"I know them. I've met them before. My skirts are cleaner than theirs. They would betray the companies and the miners together for an extra dollar. If I'm betraying any one, it's where the greatest good is served. The men are fools to follow like sheep, and even though they don't know it, I'm leading them to a better end than their blessed Brotherhood officers will take them."

"You only make excuses! It's crooked, low work, and you know it is."

His eyes narrowed. He rose and took hold of her arms, standing before her.

"Maybe so, Judith. But don't you see what I'm trying to do? If this strike becomes bad, this camp will be filled with hired gunmen brought in by the company in desperation. I know the breed, and I know what a low lot they are. They live on violence, and if they don't find it they make it to order. I've advised my people to hold off before making that move. I don't trust the company any more than the men; I've had to work alone. I have tried to trap and expose these conspirators who pose as friends of the miners; and once exposed the way I can do it, their grip will be broken. Then it will be possible to talk sense."

"Yes. With defeated men."

"No. Let the regular miners' unions organize here. Let them send delegates to advise the men, as the unions have tried to do and failed. The unions have disowned this organization and denounced its leaders as treacherous cutthroats. But no one can do anything while the men follow them and trust in them. I'm here to get those fellows, and now they know it and are out to get me first. They don't care if the camp is flooded with mine guards. They can skip out and preserve their hides. I want to prevent the coming of the guards, to save the lives of a hundred honest fools. Is that reason enough for my being here?"

"I suppose so," she said.

"IT doesn't matter a lot, anyway. I told you I live my own life and to hell with any man who can't take care of himself. Or any woman for that matter."

Her firm upper lip began to tremble.

"Yes, I know. It's to hell with the woman you can bully, who can't take care of herself enough to send you packing."

He smiled, still holding her.

"You can take care of yourself, Judith. That's why I want you. There's nothing weak in you, even if you can't fight me. We're going out together, understand. While I'm strong and able I'll get what I want in this world."

Judith shook her head in denial. Then another thought came to her.

"Yes, and suppose you were not strong and able. Suppose you had been crushed by a fall of rock in that mine, or had a hand blown off. Where

would your talk of taking what you want get you then?"

Judith was asking a question which few men in the prime of their strength ever can answer. They cannot conceive of a time when they must rely on other than their arrogant power. Yet Dugan had thought of the question before. And he had answered it according to his lights.

"I wouldn't talk then, Judith. I'd have nothing to talk about if it happened. I don't know how I'll die, and I don't care. So long as it's quick. If I ever have to ask a favor of any man, I'll do the job myself. And that goes for women, too."

She said nothing.

"I've a man's strength to offer a woman," he went on, "and I never bargain. I never have, and no one in this world will ever be able to say that I did."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MOB.

THE night came. And with it came the cold. Darkness closed over the narrow gulch swiftly, and out of the north a chill wind blew. Along the street raced gusty swirls of dust and rustling leaves, swooping under the raised sidewalk and flying to the eaves of houses. In the thin moonlight men walked abroad again, hurrying on unknown errands, and the tread of their feet echoed after them on the hollow planks.

Dugan ate supper calmly in the kitchen, where Judith had draped blankets over the windows to conceal the light. Several times while he was at the table, she went to the front room to peer outside. In the midst of her fear and despite the stormy emotions which racked her soul, Judith bore a manner of pride which Dugan thrilled to see. It was the unconscious pride of a beautiful woman, a woman clear-eyed, full breasted and strong, who has fought and surrendered and found glory and pain together in her defeat. Dugan knew women, and he did not fail to consider, as he watched, the Gethsemane that was hers.

Once, as she sat silent over her untasted food, her eyes brooding, he reached over and gently took her hand.

"It's all right, lady mine."

She sighed and shook her head mutely.

"Yes, and it will be," he insisted.

"Maybe for one of us. Never for both," said Judith.

On his face was the wide, assured smile of a man without fear.

"Two of us, lady. Or none at all."

Then fiercely her hand gripped his. From the outer door came a summons, as though some one tapped on the panels with a weapon.

"They've come!" said Judith.

Dugan stood up. He took the gun from his waist.

"You go answer," he told her. "I'll be right behind you. If they want me—"

"I'll tell them you're not here. Hide. Go, quickly!"

"No," said Dugan. "If they want me, I'll come to the door myself."

Judith went. At her door she found half a dozen men. They stood there, faces dim in the darkness, hostile to her.

"We want Dugan."

Her hand tried to still the terrible pounding of her heart.

"He's gone. Yesterday. Oh, he went off quickly."

"We've come for Dugan, Mrs.

Frane, and we're not going without him."

"I tell you he's not here. He isn't!"

The spokesman stood silent. Then he said:

"This camp is a dangerous place for spies, Judith Frane. Men or women."

There was a distinct menace in the words. Judith felt Dugan's hand on her, drawing her back into the hallway. Dugan himself stepped to the threshold. Squarely he faced them, and the moon slid over the cañon wall and its light reflected cold fire in his eyes.

"This camp is a damn dangerous place for the lot of you right this minute," he said. "You see this? It's a gun. I've used it before, and it'll be used to-night if you don't get in a hurry."

The group of men stood silent. The foremost found his voice.

"You're coming along with us, Dugan, if we have to come back in a mob and burn down the house to get you."

"Get out of here, you scum!" said Dugan.

"There'll be no second chance, you dirty turncoat," cried one who stood beside the spokesman. He moved, swinging a heavy steel bar.

Dugan plunged forward. His hand rose and the gun flashed in the moonlight for a second as the barrel struck. The man dropped the steel, cried out once, and fell backward among his companions.

"Get, or by the living God, I start shooting!" snarled Dugan. There was passion in his voice, and they shrank away from the doorway. Two of them stooped to pick up the stricken man. He moaned, holding his hands to his head.

They moved off, silent, trembling with hatred and with fear, and were gone among the shadows. Dugan slammed the door.

JUDITH was sick. The sound of that blow echoed in her ears, and her knees trembled. Seeing Dugan, she loathed him, and then watching the fire that blazed so hotly in his eyes, she feared him. She retreated to the kitchen, where she dropped into her chair and hid her face in her hands.

Dugan sat down and resumed eating. After a moment he spoke.

"Well? Did that bother you?"

"It was terrible."

He laughed without humor.

"Would it be any nicer if they got hold of me?"

"But you struck so quickly! Haven't you done enough to make them want to kill you?"

For a moment he made no reply, looking at her. Then he said patiently:

"Judith, you noticed they went off, didn't you?""

"Yes."

"Well, that's the answer. They went off. That's what I wanted. I jumped them before they jumped me."

She merely returned his gaze, unable to argue, and the tiny wrinkles gathered in the corners of his eyes. He laughed at her, and fell to finishing his meal.

Presently Judith rose and went into the dining room. She covered the window there with a tablecloth and lighted the lamp. In one corner of the room was a trunk, over which a printed blue cotton cloth was draped. She pulled the trunk away from the place, and drew back the thin carpet from the wall. The bare boards were below.

Next Judith repaired to the kitchen closet, from which she took a claw hammer. In the dining room again, she went on her knees at the exposed

section of floor. She began prying at the nails driven into the wood.

Dugan, watching her, followed to see what was her intent.

"Hold on. I'll do that," he said.

Judith relinquished the hammer, and moved aside for him to apply the claw to the nail heads.

"What's down here?" asked Dugan.

"Nothing," said Judith.

Only one or two houses in Hungry Horse were erected over a cellar. Most of those along the main street were raised a couple of feet off the ground, and the high sidewalk in front was almost flush with their doorsteps. Beneath houses and sidewalk was a dark, empty space into which stray papers blew, and where fleeing dogs took refuge from stones or occasional boisterous bullets.

Dugan persevered at his task until all the nails were uprooted from a dozen planks whose ends just exactly touched the wall. He was curious to know the purpose of his labors, but forbore from questioning Judith until she should reveal it. She signified that he had done enough.

"Stand away now," she bade him. "I think I can move it."

It proved that she could. She thrust the claws of the hammer between two of the planks, and lifted. The board raised, sidewise. In fact, when all six of the released boards rose slightly, and when Dugan caught the elevated edge with his fingers and drew up, a trapdoor cut into the floor came open. A draft of cool night air rose from the darkness below.

"What's down there?" asked Dugan.

"Only the ground," she answered. "I found this in the floor when I moved in. I simply nailed it down and forgot it until now."

"And what are you going to do with it?"

"You're leaving this way."

"Oh, I am!" said Dugan.

They looked at each other.

"Are you crazy?" she demanded at last. "Are you going to wait till they've broken down the front door?"

"Will they?"

"Stop tormenting me. You know better than I do they will."

He looked down the yawning hole in the floor.

"It's a hell of a note for me, going out like this." He reached out a foot and slammed the door back into place. "All right. If I have to, I'll drop through that and be gone. Meantime, let's forget it."

And he smiled and kissed her, and she pressed her fingernails into her palms to keep from crying out. Then she felt weak and crept into his arms and permitted him to hold her for a space, as though to draw from him a measure of his strength.

THEY became aware presently of a low, persistent knocking at the rear door. Dugan released her, and moved swiftly. She followed him into the kitchen, where he shut the door behind them and blew out the lamp. In the darkness he approached the door, found the knob, and after listening a moment, in which the knocking was repeated, jerked it wide open. His gun was thrust into the dim glow of reflected moonlight outside. On the step stood a man, alone.

"Dugan? It's me, Murdock."

"What do you want?"

"Let me in. I want to talk."

Dugan waited a moment, watching the shadows, listening. Then he waved the pistol.

"If you're alone, come in. If you're

not, I'll drop you before you move a step."

"I'm alone."

Murdock entered. He stood quietly inside while the door was closed and locked again, and peered at them in the light beneath heavy eyebrows when a match touched the wick of the lamp. Dugan thrust the gun down his waist.

"Well, what brings you here? Don't you know I'm poison to be calling on to-night?"

"Yes, and I know it well," said Murdock. A flicker of suppressed emotion passed over his dark eyes. "But it doesn't matter now. I've been well poisoned already."

He ran a hand through his stiff black hair and sat down at the table, to stare moodily at his hands. Judith remained with her back to the dining room door, watching him in mingled dread and eagerness. Dugan waited in the center of the floor, hands on hips, his eyes watchful and probing.

Murdock glanced up quickly.

"They pinned it on you at last. I fought them and cursed them, but they showed me. That paper." He stopped.

"My report?" Dugan prompted with irony.

"Yes, that report. No doubt you've sent others before it."

"I did."

"So they believe. And they're going to kill you for it."

Dugan laughed. He threw his head back and paced up and down the room. The other two followed him with their eyes.

"Well, so they're going to kill me!" said Dugan. "They got together, the whole gang of them, and talked each other into trying to get me, did they?" He halted and fixed Murdock with his gaze. "Listen here. You're as much a fool as the rest of them, but I'm going to tell you something. If there's trouble around this town to-night, you keep out of it. If they get me, twenty of them will drop before I do. Hear that? Twenty!"

Murdock grunted morose skepticism.

"You'll count them in the morning," went on Dugan. "Maybe you'll count a hundred and twenty before you're through. What do you think I'm waiting here for? I could have ducked out of this camp twenty-four hours ago. I'm waiting because I know that thirty-six hours after this strike was called a trainload of armed guards is due to arrive. And the Governor is tipped off to have two companies of militia ready to jump in if that ain't enough."

Murdock stared, unbelievingly. Judith caught her breath and a wild hope gleamed in her eyes.

"To hell with your Dark Brotherhood," said Dugan abruptly. "There ain't enough nerve in the lot of you to match a rabbit's. I've got you buffaloed, every last one of you. Now go on back and tell them what I said."

Murdock was on his feet. His face was red with wrath, and his clenched hands trembled at his sides. Murdock was an honest man.

"May the blood of every man who dies in this camp be on your soul, Dugan!" he said. "May you suffer all the sufferings of the women and children who will perish here!"

Dugan shot a glance at Judith, and came close to Murdock.

"Stop that. You said enough. If you got anything more to tell me, say it. Otherwise get out."

Murdock's eyes blazed into Dugan's.

"I was sent here to warn you that if you did not give yourself up within the hour, this house will be attacked. If you think anything of Judith Frane you'll walk out with me under my pro-

tection and surrender to the committee at the meeting hall. That's all."

"Enough at that," said Dugan. "You're a good man, Murdock, even if you are a fool. Go back to your Brotherhood and repeat what I said. In other words, tell them to walk in a body down to the railroad trestle and hop off. Good night."

And Murdock went, with Dugan's hearty chuckles following after as he went out the darkened door.

WHEN they were alone, Judith came to him. "Do you mean that? Is that true?"

"Why?" he asked. "Would you like it to be?"

"Then—then it isn't?"

"Hanged if I know. Maybe it is. I told them to hold off for a time. I can't say I'd mind now if they decided not to follow my advice. It'd be just my devil's own luck to have a train-load of huskies show up here to-morrow morning, and pull the fat out of the fire for me! But it won't be pleasant for the town if they come."

Despite herself, Judith smiled, even though wearily. All the pain and torment of the last day and night paled before the utter recklessness of him. There were moments when she permitted herself the bitter sweet delight of thinking herself his woman, he her man. Moments removed from the necessity of thinking about all the outraged ideals of loyalty she bore. Such a moment was this, when his hard, cruel recklessness became somehow irresistibly gallant, and the fear of him that was instinctive in her died.

"I think I do love you!" she said.

"Bet you do, lady mine. And I'm not going to let a little thing like a strike interfere with the important things of life."

"Is it important?"

He studied her eyes a moment, serious. Then he laughed quickly, and caressed her hand.

"Maybe it is at that, darling. I'll have to look into it when we get more time."

They did not know, as they waited now, if the threat transmitted by Murdock would be carried out. It was just possible that Dugan's defiance and his promise of aid in the morning might deter the more sober element among the miners. Dugan paced up and down the kitchen floor, and Judith sat with her arms on the table. They were silent. Occasionally Judith turned her head to listen for the sounds that came in the night, while her eyes widened with suspense and apprehension.

Then the quiet of the evening was rent by a great sound that rolled down the cañon like thunder and shook the ground beneath it. The windows rattled in their frames, and slow echoes of the explosion returned from the upper gulch. Dugan stood stock-still.

"By Heaven! I bet they found the dynamite cache!" he said.

"That came from up by the mill," cried Judith.

"The damned fools!" Dugan cursed the company. "Why didn't they throw that stuff in the creek, as long as they had to get rid of it! The men only had to hunt till they found it."

He went to the front room and peered through the darkened window. The street was empty, but up the creek a great fire burned. Down the night came the sound of shooting and the shouts of men. The strikers were gathering.

Dugan mounted the stairs, and took from the table in his room two boxes of cartridges. He thrust them in his

back pockets. When he returned below, Judith was lifting up the trapdoor in the dining room.

"Looks like there's no argument now, lady," Dugan said.

Gone were Judith's trembling and fear. She was pale, but a grimness possessed her that gave back the strength to her limbs.

"I should say not!" she returned. "You were asking for it, and it's come. Get down here, and give me time to pull the trunk over the door."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FACE OF DEATH.

DUGAN stood listening. Passing through that hole in the floor was in a sense the acceptance of defeat. He would have refused, if that were at all possible. But it was not.

A mob was coming. On the cold night wind their voices rode before them. They cried out as they advanced, gathering courage from the swelling roar for the commission of a dreadful and deliberate deed. At bottom fear lurked in their breasts, for they knew not what the morrow would bring. And they whipped each other's spirits to the frenzy in which mobs rend and kill.

Dugan accepted. He sat on the floor, with his feet hanging in darkness.

"Say good-by to me, lady mine!"

Judith kneeled beside him. Her arms went about him and drew him tightly to her. Her hand held his head against her soft breast, and her fingers were in his hair.

"Oh, how can I let you go?"

"That's the way it is, old girl. If I don't come back, forget me quick."

"I can't. No matter what you've done, I want you back. You must come back!"

He smiled. "All right, Judith, I'll come back. Take care of yourself."

And he dropped out of sight into the shallow darkness below.

In front of the Widow Frane's boarding house the mob gathered. Along the sidewalk they came at a run, at the door they surged back like a spent wave, and into the road along the railroad tracks they flowed. Lanterns swung in their hands, and beams of light shot up from below to make their faces grotesque.

Men were shouting unheeded exhortations. Some cursed and pressed violently forward, some were planted rocklike and silent and withstood the impetuous onrush before the door. Borden, the president, with Murdock supporting him, reared precariously above their heads on a flimsy box. Fright was in his eyes and desperation. He flung his hands and cried out to them, and no one listened. The Brotherhood was beyond his control.

Dugan smiled. He crouched low in the darkness under the house. All he could see were legs, running, fighting, stumbling. All he could hear was the meaningless bellow of the mob. He watched. He was safe.

There was a crash of glass. That meant a window. It meant, too, that they would enter the house and find him gone. Unlikely that they would ever discover him beneath them, but Dugan knew he must travel while their attention was bent on the house alone. He scrambled forward through the casual, dusty litter. In the space under the sidewalk he halted. Before him in the road, so that he might almost reach out a hand and touch them, were the dark clad legs of men. Above the feet of others stamped on the

planks, and dust settled upon him through the cracks. He turned and headed down street on hands and knees.

The sidewalk concealed his progress for seventy-five yards. Beyond that was only the packed earth of the trail. Here ended the string of houses, except for odd shacks which hover on the outskirts of every camp. Here, too, there were no lamps, only moonlight.

Dugan waited in the shadow of the abrupt edge of the walk, watching the night. The street here was empty. Farther down, across the creek where the mill was afire, men ran about. The company faction, perhaps, desperately combating the flames. If Dugan could cross the creek and join them he would have a fighting chance. There was probably a guard of miners hovering about, but he might pass the cordon.

HE could see the light bridge. It was impossible to say whether it was guarded or not. It swung in the moonlight, fragile and empty, a span of one hundred and fifty feet at least. Any one crossing it would be a fair target. And any one approaching the bridge would be a better.

Dugan came from beneath the walk and stood erect beside the dark house that ended the town. The sound of the mob still came from Judith's house. He could neither see nor hear anything stirring in his vicinity. He set off down the path at a swift walk.

Each darkened shack held menace. Three he passed. His gun was in his hand, held close to his body. He trod lightly on his feet, as a boxer might. At the fourth shack he stopped. A man stood by the side wall, out of the moonlight. He did not move.

"So you beat them to it, Dugan!"

"Did I?" said Dugan, and advanced with gentle steps.

The man laughed.

"This was too easy, waiting here for you." Then his breath caught. "Help!" he shouted.

Dugan's gun barrel had cracked on the man's wrist. A revolver clattered against a rock, silvered in the pale light. The man threw his hands to his face. Dugan struck again, and the man fell against the wall of the little house. He lay silent in the shadow.

For a moment Dugan remained without moving. He listened. Behind him came the sound of a man running over the hollow planks. Dugan turned, looked, and was off toward the bridge. He ran, without heed or disguise. A shot followed him. A long, exultant cry arose in the town, and the voice of the mob repeated it.

A man rose up out of darkness between Dugan and the bridge. They fired together. Dugan halted and aimed his second shot, and the man vanished into the blackness from which he had emerged. Dugan went on. Down creek, on the other side, the flames about the mill grew thinner.

THE bridge, suspended on rope of steel, swung to his stride. He stumbled, and went on with lurching steps. Rifle shots cracked in the night behind him. A bullet struck the strand of steel alongside, and spun off skyward with a sudden vicious whine. And Dugan tripped headlong the instant after.

He tried to scramble to his feet. He could not. His right leg buckled and he fell again. The leg was beneath him at a crazy angle. Dugan cursed, raging at the treacherous thing. The bridge gave a lurch as a miner came out on it at a run. Dugan forgot the leg. He crouched and brought up the gun and fired. The man spun about in his

charge, and landed headlong and sodden on the bridge floor. The others at his back came to a halt. Their cries enraged Dugan.

"Come on, you lousy scum!" he roared. "You got me now, ain't you? Then come and get me; come on!"

He fired twice. Then he tore the pack of cartridges from his pocket and broke it open. Lying flat on the gentle swaying bridge, he reloaded.

They had him now. There was no escape. He could not move, and presently they knew that even were he able to resume his flight it would be in vain. For up from the mill, where dying flames clung tenaciously to the huge structure, came a body of men at a run, attracted by the shooting. The Dark Angels af the town side of the bridge hailed them from afar. They were the afterguard of the dynamiting party. They were come to be in on the kill.

Dugan saw them. As they approached the bridge end he sent a shot whining toward them. They halted. They were uncertain, but the cries from the other side of the creek, and the sight of that lone figure crouched in the center of the span, would soon enlighten them.

"Come on!" defied Dugan. "Keep a coming, you rats. You got me, have you? Well, come and get me!"

Dugan knew why they did not send a volley to tear him to pieces where he lay. They wanted him alive. Broken and helpless, but alive. And Dugan intended that their hands should never touch him until death had thwarted their designs. He who had lived with lusty and ruthless courage now courted death.

Bullets flew, to be sure. The planks about him recoiled with the shock of sudden impacts, and long slivers of torn wood upreared after the passage of glancing slugs. But no missile struck Dugan. Shot after shot he sent toward them where they clamored in the shadows, and he had no knowledge of where the bullets struck.

And each shot, defiant and undismayed, wooed the last mercy he could ever know.

JUDITH, cowering beside the blue-covered trunk in her dining room, was merely numb. From the moment when the crash of glass had announced the invasion of the Brotherhood she had ceased to know either fear or hope. They stormed all through the house, opening doors and investigating every hiding place upstairs and down. They refused to believe that Dugan could have escaped them. To Judith they came, a ring of harsh faces.

"Where is he?"

Judith stood with her back to the wall. She found herself laughing.

"He's gone. You'll never find him."

"We damn well intend to. Tell us where he is."

"I damn well won't tell you!"

One of them took her wrist in his hard hand. He jerked on it so that she was drawn abruptly away from the wall.

"You talk or you get slapped, you hear?"

Fright paled her face for a second, and then she laughed once again in defiance.

"Go ahead. Slap me. It would be like you."

The man may have intended to carry out his threat. He was in no mood for trifling. But he had no chance to strike Judith. The ring of faces was broken asunder as Murdock plunged forward and seized the man's arm.

"Let her be, you," he told them.

The man eyed Murdock.

"You still butting in?"

"Yes. Where Judith Frane is concerned. She's out of this."

"She's in it deep," said the man. "I think you are too."

Murdock clung to the tensed muscles of that arm.

"I'm telling you to let her be!"

The man loosed his grip on Judith's wrist, and drove his fist at Murdock's face. Murdock ducked. And then they both went perfectly still, as did every man in the room.

Out in the street a shrill cry, laden with cruel exultation, rose in the night. It was wordless but unmistakable. The trail was found. In a moment the room was empty, and the sound of running boots were pounding down the street in a great rush for the creek. Judith was alone.

For a brief space Judith could only sit weakly on the trunk with her face hidden in her hands. The thought of what might be happening out in the white moonlight was too appalling. And then she was on her feet, driven to a desperation by the same thought. She went into the kitchen. In a closet was an oil lantern. She lighted this, and, drawing her shawl about her, ran through the rooms and out into the street.

The sound of gunfire came to her from the bridge. She could see the lanterns bobbing there, and being extinguished as bullets from the quarry's gun came too close. Judith ran along the sidewalk.

A great number of people remained some distance from the bridge, watching and running about. Others took cover in positions nearer, where they could return the fire from the bridge. Judith passed among these unhindered. No one was sufficiently self-possessed to observe her and guess her sudden intention.

She was still running, her breath coming fast, when a man leaped up out of the brush beside the path. He attempted to stop her. Judith dodged him, swinging abruptly to one side. She was gone past him in a breath. He ran a few paces after her, shouting, and then halted uncertainly.

THERE were others ahead. One stood up and his revolver glistened in the moonlight. He cried out for her to stop, and leveled his pistol. Judith raced upon him, unheeding.

Another man came through the brush at a headlong rush. He, too, shouted out at her. But she heard none of them. The face of the man with the gun was clear, wrought with cruel wrath. It seemed that his fingers tensed on the trigger.

"Oh, God, don't let him!" Judith prayed. "Don't let him shoot!"

It was somehow a good prayer. The man with the gun was flung headlong beside the path by that other who had come racing toward them. The newcomer was Murdock, and he had no sooner turned, obviously to intercept Judith himself, when a shot was fired into his body from another gun not ten yards off. Murdock fell.

As Judith passed him, she heard the tortured plea he sent after her.

"Judith Frane! Don't go out there! Don't—"

She raced on. The way was clear. Holding the lantern before her, so that its light shone full on her flowing skirts, she reached the bridge. Out in the center of the span she saw Dugan.

Dugan was aware of a let-up in the firing, and in wonder he withheld his own retaliation. He sensed some crisis

on the bank of the creek, and judged that a fight had broken out among the men themselves. He watched. And the flying figure of Judith came into his sight at the bridge end.

For a second he could not understand. Then he tried desperately to arise, to cry out, to wave her back.

"Stay back! Judith, don't come out here!"

She came on. Out on the slender span she ran, the soft glow of the lantern before her. Straight to Dugan she came, and dropped to her knees beside him.

Dugan was frantic with fear now. Fear for her, who had done this incredible thing.

"Judith! Judith!"

There was a trembling unreality in her voice.

"I could not wait for you to come back now. They could not stop me."

Her hands drew his head close to her breast, and once more her fingers tangled in his hair. Against the warm softness of her Dugan could fight no longer. His shattered knee, broken, he knew, beyond restoration ever, was in a vise of white-hot torment. His heart, which had never faltered, seemed to pause and permit a draining of all courage from him. Dugan, who no man had mastered, surrendered.

"They got me," he said. "Why didn't they finish the job? Judith, why didn't they finish the job? Why did you come here?"

"They'll finish no job," said Judith. She took the gun from his hand.

"I can't fight any more. They licked me. They've broken me."

She soothed him.

"It's over, my dearest. They are through. They won't dare touch you now while I'm here."

She said nothing of her grim determination to use the gun on any man who approached; to shield Dugan with herself; to wait there on the bare bridge an eternity if need be; to let him die, if he must die, with his beloved body sacred from violation in her arms.

ASHORE there was dismay and consternation. For all their blood lust, there were few who were not somewhat sobered by two things: the fall of Murdock, and the inescapable fact that it would be necessary now to shoot a woman to get at Dugan.

Borden, the president, frightened by this situation so completely out of hand, and uncertain of himself after learning of Dugan's previous revelations to his employers, wrought earnestly during that appalled moment to weaken their resolve. Murdock himself, wounded but stirred by the strength of an heroic ardor, called on them from where he had fallen in the path to be content with what they had done, to leave their helpless quarry to the competent hands of the appointed committee.

Among the great body of men, indecision and a sudden chill helplessness came to attack their insatiable desire for revenge. They were aware all at once that they were a mob without leaders.

Out on the span Dugan was speaking, his voice muffled against Judith's breast.

"They've broken me. They've broken me, I tell you."

"You stood them off. You beat them. Oh, my dearest, don't say that again!"

"They're going to get me. I want them to get me. They've left me only half a man."

Her voice crooned.

"And what of that? You're still twice the man that any of them is."

They could hear stirrings on both banks of the creek. Figures moved in the moonlight; baffled, uncertain figures. The night was quiet. Even the mill was dark and still. Voices rose in a murmur and died again and the guns were silenced. There was peace, a peace which trembled with suspense for what might be coming.

Dugan remained without speaking for a space. Then his hands gripped Judith.

"Do you mean that?"

"What, darling? That you're a man?"

"Yes."

She held him tenderly, yet with a certain exultant fierceness.

"If you're less of a man, I'm happy. Oh, God, I've prayed for that! Because you'll be mine, mine, always."

Dugan said nothing, as Judith hurried on:

"Never would I have loved you without hating you, the way you were. Never again will you be able to be Dugan the rough-shod, the bully. But you'll be mine!"

Dugan looked at her face. The glow from the lantern beside them shone on a beauty such as he could not remember ever seeing before.

"Judith—you still want me, for good?"

And her smile was also something that Dugan could not remember seeing ever before.

"Do you?" she said.

They forgot for that moment that death still lurked in the shadows that began beyond the tiny circle of light from their lantern, and were together alone. Even the dawn that was coming they forgot, and all that might be borne on the wings of the morning. Of pain and hatred and suffering they lost for one brief space all knowledge.

Deaf, too, were their ears to a far-off sound of enormous significance, a plaintive, rising wail that came thinly up the long valley; and their eyes did not see the point of light which grew more intense each moment as it approached through the miles. The Outside had taken cognizance of Hungry Horse. A trainload of militia raced with the dawn, militia ordered on an errand of mercy by a wise governor who forbade the employment of private armed guards to do battle with a deluded people.

Peace it was that was borne on the wings of that morning.

THE END.

Ladybugs and the Price of Apples

IF the ladybug crop is short in the Wenatchee Valley of the State of Washington in the spring, the price of apples is higher in the Fall.

The tiny red insects, natural enemy of the destructive apple aphis, are planted about a thousand to the acre in the orchards. Ten million supply the annual demand in the Wenatchee Valley. Clark Turner is the "ladybug king." He finds his bugs each spring in crevices in the mountains and delivers them in units of a thousand. A recent winter was a hard one on ladybugs and Turner had only three million on hand when apple growers put in their orders. The market quotation on ladybugs touched a new high level.

Leon Rowland.

He was dragged out like a sack of potatoes

The Treasure on Skeleton Key

Tommy Varden expected plenty of thrills on his Florida treasure-hunt—but he never dreamed what a ruthless menace he would unearth o his innocent-seeming isle of mystery

By LORING BRENT

Author of "Bringing the Boom to Vingo," "Vingo's Benevolent Bloodhounds," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

TOMMY VARDEN, convalescing from illness, comes to the ten thousand islands off the Gulf coast of Florida, and buys Friendship Key, in spite of the popular belief that it and its northern neighbor, Skeleton Key, are haunted. Mysterious old Ezra Cable, who lives with his granddaughter Joan on Skeleton Key, tries to buy or scare Tommy off, but he refuses to leave.

The first night, he leaves his frightened negro, Blue, in the hastily erected house, and proceeds to hunt for the treasure presumably buried on this key by his pirate ancestor, John Varden.

This story began in the Argosy for October 26.

But according to his reckoning, the spot indicated in the pirate's letter is exactly in the center of Dead Man's Pass, the swift and treacherous channel between the two keys!

CHAPTER V.

DEAD MAN'S PASS.

TOMMY VARDEN, with painful thoroughness, examined the northern end of the key from side to side. He found no circular pile of smaller stones. He found nothing of helpfulness whatever.

Captain John Varden had, on his deathbed, played the cruellest of practical jokes on his great-great-grandson. For a hundred and thirteen years, the spirit of that letter to Ebenezer Varden had remained alive. In that black hell where dead pirates go, Captain John Varden was no doubt cackling with mirth.

Then Tommy had another thought. Perhaps it wasn't a practical joke. One hundred and thirteen years is a long span in the life of a sandy key. What geographic changes might not have been wrought by winds and storm-tossed waters within this little archipelago?

One hundred and thirteen years ago, it was possible that Starfish Key and Skeleton Key had been one long, banana-shaped island. The pass, deep though it now was, might have been hammered through a low-lying portion of the island; storms might have beaten the opening deeper and deeper until, finally, the present deep pass was carved.

Tommy looked out over the swirling, moonlit water. He made the estimate again and again. Where would the thousandth pace fall? Again and again he was forced to the same answer: In the precise middle of Dead Man's Pass.

Treasure there might have been—a tidy fortune in jewels, trade dollars and Spanish doubloons. That treasure was now forever placed beyond the greedy reach of man.

More disappointed than he had ever been in his life, Tommy made his way back to the cabin. He found Blue asleep on the cot at the eastern end of the kitchen.

Tommy sat down on a palm stump in the moonlight. Gone was the romance from the night. Gone the richness and the longing. Friendship Key had become, in a twinkling, a dreary place, and he had but a few hundred dollars in his pocket—in the world!

Restlessness drove him down to the little cove. The Barracuda was made fast to the dock. The tender was pulled up on the beach.

Tommy gave one thought to his weakened heart and dragged the tender into the water. He shipped the oars and began to row. He rowed to the northern end of the key. The tide was on the ebb. He was only slightly alarmed as the light rowboat was caught in the sweep of the tide and carried into the pass. But he rested on his oars. He would not attempt to fight that millrace. He would permit it to carry him into the gulf. In his own good time, he would pull back and beach the tender on the western shore. To-morrow, when the tide was making, he would row back through the pass.

When the boat was midway down the pass between the two keys, Tommy scrambled into the stern. He unshipped an oar. Perhaps the pass was not so deep as Ben Tupple had said. It was his intention to feel around with the oar. That iron chest might be lying

on the bottom, exposed. He might find it and, with ropes, bring it to the surface.

Tommy reached down with the oar. He pushed it down until his hand and a part of his forearm were submerged. Then, mysteriously, the oar seemed to be twisted and wrenched from his hand. Doubtless, the blade had been engaged by some swift subsurface current.

Tommy shot his hand down after it. In his anxiety to recover the oar, he lost his balance. Perhaps weakness, due to overexertion, was responsible. At all events, Tommy Varden, with hands clawing for a hold, went slipping down off the stern of the tender.

Much later, he was certain that as he went, he had heard a wailing scream somewhere off to the north.

It was, perhaps, due to his presence of mind in catching a deep breath of air as he was plucked under, that he ever lived to remember anything. He was being jerked downward as if by clutching hands and his lungs were threatening to burst.

IT is strange, how in such moments, a man will think of certain things.

Tommy did not review his past life as drowning men are supposed to do. He thought of the doctor's warning: "My boy, take it easy. Your lungs and your heart have had a fight. They are weak. Treat them considerately for awhile."

And as he was spun about, Heaven knows how many fathoms deep in the treacherous currents of Dead Man's Pass, Tommy recalled the doctor's warning. His heart was begging for air. His lungs were preparing to burst.

His furious efforts to reach the distant surface were wasted energy. He recalled that little block of driftwood. How long had it stayed under? Five minutes! No man in his physical condition could stay under water that long.

A white round ball of light flashed in Tommy's eyes. The moon! He heard the awful sobbing of his breath and knew that he had not the strength to reach shore; then a faint voice—a ghostly voice—exclaimed:

"Take it easy! I've got you!"

And as Tommy started to slip under again, too weak to save himself, something seized the back of his shirt collar, and the same faint voice said:

"Relax, you fool!"

Tommy relaxed. He might have been at the mercy of a ghost—the ghost, perhaps, of old Captain Varden. He did not care. He was so exhausted that he did not care, even, if he drowned. He heard soft, regular breathing behind him. He relaxed.

He was practically unconscious when he was dragged upon the western beach of Friendship Key. The dragging was not gentle. He was dragged as if he were a sack of potatoes.

Tommy did not regain an interest in the proceedings until the full, clear, indignant voice of a girl inquired:

"Are you alive or are you dead?"

Tommy, sitting up, shook his head slightly, as a pugilist shakes his head when he has received a nasty clip on the jaw. He sat up and his faintness gave way to amazement.

The girl standing before him in the moonlight was slim and golden. Her bathing suit was the sort that beach censors grow indignant about. The rest was golden arms and legs. Even in the moonlight, they were golden.

"Who," Tommy dazedly inquired, "are you?"

"Joan Cable."

"Where did you come from?"

"Skeleton Key." Her voice was crisp and scornful.

She was looking down at him. Most of her face was in shadow. Her eyes were purple pools. Her hair, plastered to her small head, was as short as a boy's.

It penetrated Tommy Varden's dazed mind that she was watching him, not with friendliness or sympathy, but with defiance and hostility.

"It was kind of you," he said lamely, "to jump in and pull me out."

"Yes," she agreed. "As if you didn't see me standing there! As if you didn't go overboard on purpose! It shows what a fool you are."

TOMMY looked up at her in astonishment, and blurted: "Do you think I went overboard on purpose?"

"I know you did. You haven't fooled me for a moment!"

Tommy's astonishment grew. It was evident that this girl, who had saved his life, hated him.

"Why," he demanded, "should I have gone overboard? I almost drowned."

"So I could save you. So you could meet me!"

Tommy said, "Hmmm," very thoughtfully.

"Don't you suppose," Joan Cable demanded, in the same full, clear, scornful voice, "that I know why you came to this island?"

Tommy tried to stand up. After several unsuccessful attempts, he lurched to his feet and stood swaying. He towered perhaps a foot above Joan Cable.

Now that she had to look up to meet his eyes, her face came entirely out of the shadow. The moon flooded it. Scimitars of black brows were arched above dark gleaming eyes. Her face was oval, well-formed and young. He guessed her age at twenty.

"There seems to be a mystery or a misunderstanding," said Tommy. "Your grandfather came over here this afternoon and accused me of building a cabin here so I could spy on him. I have no interest in him. I told him so. I can only say the same thing to you, Miss Cable."

Her eyes narrowed a little and continued to probe into his.

"Clever!" she murmured. "You're so clever! But you aren't fooling me. I know why you came to this island. You came here for me. You have heard these stories about my being a prisoner here. And you came to rescue me!"

"Did I?" Tommy breathed.

"Oh, stop pretending! You're the romantic type. You went to all this trouble to rescue a poor girl in distress. I suppose I should be grateful and flattered. I'm not! I don't want your help."

It took Tommy some time to realize that this slim, scornful girl meant what she was saying. But he remained incredulous.

"Let me get this straight," he said. "You think I came to this island, built this cabin, in order to be close to you? That I had the romantic idea that I would somehow rescue you from —from a life of captivity. Is that right?"

"You know it's right."

The humor of it was more than Tommy could resist. She was so small, so serious, so defiant. He began to laugh. Joan Cable stiffened. She tilted up her chin. Her eyes went still narrower. He could hear the click of her teeth as they snapped together. She turned about and walked swiftly toward the water.

Weakly, Tommy called after her: "Wait!"

Joan Cable turned. With one foot in the water, she waited. Tommy walked toward her.

"I owe you a lot," he said, "for hauling me out of the water. What I'm going to say may sound rude, but it ought to relieve your mind. Miss Cable, I haven't the slightest interest in you. I never heard of you before this noon. I haven't the slightest intention of rescuing you from a life of captivity. I came here to get away from people—particularly from women. I don't like women. I distrust women. If I never see you again, I will be perfectly happy. Now—do we understand each other?"

Joan Cable was staring at him. She said, in a soft, shocked voice:

"I don't believe you mean that. No—no man feels that way about women."

"This man does."

"You—you hate women?"

"No," said Tommy. "They merely leave me cold. I learned my lesson. I'll never trust another woman as long as I live. I'll never give another woman the chance to make a fool of me the way—"

HE checked himself. The girl from Skeleton Key was staring at him with great, round, curious eyes. Her expression was one of awe. Her features softened. Even in the hard white light of the moon, she was lovely, a sea nymph. She was probably the prettiest girl Tommy Varden had ever seen, and he had met her under probably the most romantic circumstances he had ever known. But there was no response in him. She left him indifferent.

In a businesslike voice, he said: "If you'll walk across the key, I'll take you home in my boat."

"No, thanks; I'll swim." Her voice was breathless.

"I've got to go out for my tender, anyway."

"I'd rather swim."

"Through that pass."

"I know the pass."

"Suit yourself," said Tommy coldly.

She waited a moment longer, looking up at him with that same expression of awe and unbelief. Then she waded into the water until she was breast-deep and started to swim—a four-beat crawl.

Tommy watched the flash of her arms in the moonlight. He said aloud: "So I came down here to rescue a girl from captivity!"

A startled voice beyond a sand dune exclaimed: "Wheah yo' at, Misto' Tommy?" And Blue's head and shoulders were silhouetted against the moon.

Tommy explained to him that he had fallen out of the tender in Dead Man's Pass and been rescued by Miss Cable. Blue's eyes became prominent and white. He said:

"Dat gal better keep offen dis key or Ah will, suh."

"She won't annoy us again, Blue. Let's see if we can find that tender."

They put to sea in the Barracuda, and found the tender after an hour's search. Tommy was so exhausted by the day's activities that he dozed at the wheel on the way back. When the motor boat was made fast to the dock, he staggered through the sand to the cabin, changed to pyjamas, and threw himself on his cot. He was asleep immediately.

Hours later, Tommy was awakened by the chattering of teeth and the moaning of a voice. He sat up in utter darkness. The moon was gone. A voice was stuttering in terror:

"Misto Tommy—Misto Tommy—

dem ha'nts is around us! Dey—dey's all around us!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE HA'NTS.

BLUE was crouching on the floor beside the cot. Tommy could not see him, but he could hear the rattling of his teeth. It was the first time Tommy had ever heard teeth rattling in terror. He said peevishly, "Stop that, Blue. Tell me what you saw—or heard."

"L-l-listen, Misto Tommy!"

Tommy listened. The cot was trembling.

"Stop that shivering!"

"Y-yas, suh!"

In spite of himself, an icy wave trickled down his spine as he heard, somewhere overhead, the tinkling of a ghostly bell. Then, in the darkness, he grinned. He reached into the corner and picked up his rifle.

"Come along, Blue."

The rattling teeth followed Tommy out into the night. The moon was down. Palms were silhouetted dimly against stars. Somewhere, remotely overhead, the ghostly bell continued to tinkle.

Blue, in terrified accents, exclaimed: "Look a' dat!"

Tommy saw it simultaneously—a pale green ball of luminosity floating high above the palms.

"Ha'nts!" groaned the black man.

"Kites," corrected Tommy. "I'll try to prove it to you, Blue; then let's hope I won't hear any more talk about ghosts. Wait till my eyes get used to this light. Do you know why people see ghosts, Blue?"

"Yas, suh; 'cause dey's there!"

"People see ghosts," said Tommy, "because other people want to scare them. And why do other people want to scare them? To make them move on, clear out, vamose. I know that certain people want me off this island. If I believed in ghosts, I'd vamose. Watch that green light, Blue. It's swaying. Wait till it stands still. I'm aiming at it, Blue. It's so bright that I can see the light along the barrel."

The rifle crashed. The green light vanished.

"Run into the cabin and bring my flash light."

Blue reluctantly obeyed. Tommy's flash light was of the modern type which will throw an adjustable beam a thousand feet. Tommy sent the beam upward. It played faintly upon the batlike outlines of a large kite. The kite string was a momentary dancing strand of silver.

"Hold that light, Blue."

Blue's shivering had perceptibly diminished and his teeth were no longer audible. Tommy fired at the kite—and missed. He fired again. The bullet hit the kite, for the kite leaped, but it did not come down. Tommy took aim again and fired. Again the kite leaped, as though it had been hit. It staggered—and came slipping down, tinkling as it came.

TOMMY snatched the flash light from the negro's hand and played its beam upon the crumpled kite as it fell. When he saw that it would fall on the key, he started running, and Blue followed him. The kite came to earth in a clump of scrub palmettoes near the southern extremity of the key—a home-made kite of whittled sticks and dark-gray tissue paper.

It was the tail of the kite that interested Tommy the most. The tail was a length of copper wire at the end of

which was attached a drum with cardboard for the cylinder and pale-green tissue paper for the heads. Within this drum were several objects. One was a small flash light storage battery. Another was the shattered remains of a miniature lamp socket. The tiny lamp was shattered. The other item within the tissue paper drum was a crude brass bell, boxlike in shape.

Tommy, examining these items, grinned, but not entirely with amusement. The whole contraption had been designed and built with great ingenuity. The miniature lamp bulb shining against the green tissue paper drumheads had created that ghostly luminance.

Blue was examining the bell. He presently announced:

"Dis is an old Spanish calf bell, Misto Tommy. Used to be a lot of dese old bells around. Spanish used to raise cattle down here befo' de Americans come in."

Tommy said: "You won't worry about 'ha'nts' any more, will you?"

"No, suh—not onless some real ha'nts come along."

"But you thought this bell and light were real ha'nts."

"Sho'! Well, Ah ain't scairt now, Misto Tommy. No, suh. Ah—"

Blue was interrupted by a savage ripping sound close above their heads. The sound was similar to that made when canvas is quickly torn. The ripping sound was repeated.

Tommy did not at once identify that sound. He had never before been placed in this position. Distant reports verified his suspicion that the sound of tearing canvas was, in reality, the sound made by the passage through air of a high-power rifle bullet.

He snapped: "Drop flat on your stomach, Blue!"

"Dat's whuh Ah is!" came Blue's voice from the ground.

Tommy stretched out beside him. They were on a slight rise. Through a lane in the palms, Tommy could make out, in the starglow, the dark, low-lying shape of Skeleton Key.

As he watched, he saw a red spark flash. The spark was followed by the ripping sound overhead.

Tommy put his rifle to his shoulder, aimed in the general direction of the red spark, and fired.

This salute to the enemy was promptly followed by a veritable broadside from Skeleton Key. The red spark flashed at fractional second intervals. It was apparent that, while Ezra Cable might have old-fashioned ideas, he was a believer in modern firearms. The rapidity of his firing could mean only that he was using a sub-machine gun.

Perhaps thirty bullets were discharged in Tommy's general direction, then quiet descended, disturbed only by the whisper of the trade in the palms and the murmur of wavelets breaking on the beach.

Tommy fired the remaining cartridges in his magazine. But this time the enemy did not return his fire. Silence fell again and remained.

Beside him, Blue said in a quaking voice: "Never tetched us!"

And Tommy answered: "Blue, I am coming to the conclusion that that old boy doesn't want me on this island. But I'm going to disappoint him; I'm going to stay."

They returned to the cabin. An investigation with the flash light showed that old man Cable's automatic rifle fire had not been entirely without casualties. A can of condensed milk on one of the kitchen shelves had been struck, and its contents splashed all over the kitchen. The bullet had

passed through the can, through the wall, out through the front wall, and onward through the porch screen. Another bullet had punctured a bag of flour and passed on through walls and screen. A third bullet, as they discovered in the morning, had plowed a furrow through the tar paper on the eastern side of the roof.

TOMMY and Blue again retired, hoping the war was over for the time. When Tommy awoke, the sun was high and hot. The air was fragrant with the odors of coffee and frying bacon.

After breakfast Tommy walked to the southern end of the key and looked across the pass at Skeleton Key. His imagination invested it with an ominous mystery. What was old man Cable's secret? Why was he so determined not to have neighbors? Why was he keeping that beautiful girl a prisoner there?

As there were no answers available to these riddles, Tommy dismissed them. He had come to Friendship Key to get away from people, to recover his health and, if possible, his faith in humanity. If his neighbors would let him alone he would be delighted. He was not, actually, interested in them, and he certainly did not want to go to war with a vicious old man who armed himself with sub-machine guns.

Tommy devoted most of that day to further exploration. He returned again and again to the "great yellow rock," and again and again checked off his pacing in a "proper northerly direction."

Each time, his pacing ended on the narrow beach beside Dead Man's Pass. The number of paces varied; sometimes they totaled more than the original count of six hundred and eleven, and sometimes less. But it was certain that no man's paces, starting from the yellow rock, could total one thousand and at the same time end anywhere on Friendship Key.

He entertained two callers in the afternoon. The first was Ben Tupple; the second, old man Cable.

The real estate man was concerned over Tommy's safety.

"We heard all that firing last night, Mr. Varden. I thought your island was being blown up."

Tommy told him what had happened and showed him the remains of the kite.

Ben Tupple shook his head and said:

"I'd feel a lot easier in my mind if you left this place and took up my offer to live on Palm Key. Old Cable wants you out of here; and he'll get you out of here. He came over to town this morning and bought all the rest of the islands in this group. I asked him what he had against you, and he said it was none of my damned business, but that he wasn't going to have anybody snooping around."

"I haven't snooped around."

"He thinks you might."

"I'll see him some time," said Tommy, "and tell him that I'm not interested in his rum-running operations."

"Better go slow, Mr. Varden."

"I'll mind my own business," Tommy promised.

OLD MAN CABLE paid his second call on Tommy later that afternoon. Tommy was sunning himself on his beach, when he heard the husky purring of the outboard motor. He sat up and saw the black rowboat pointing toward him, with the old man in the bows.

This time Ezra Cable did not step ashore. He waited until the bows grazed the sand, and said:

"I want to buy this island."

"This island," Tommy answered, "is not for sale."

"I'll give you three thousand dollars for it."

Tommy did not answer. The old man's square face, it seemed to him, was pale.

"You won't sell?"

"No," said Tommy, and added audaciously: "Thanks for last night's entertainment—the kite, the cowbell, and the fireworks!"

The old man set his jaw more firmly. "I'm going to give you one week to clear out of here. If you aren't gone by then, I'll have you put off."

"By law?"

"I don't bother with law."

"I gathered that—last night," said Tommy.

He arose and walked down to the boat.

"Mr. Cable, I told you yesterday afternoon that I intended to live on this key. It's my key. I also told you that I am not interested in what happens over on Skeleton Key. It isn't my business, and I don't intend to make it my business. You can smuggle in all the booze there is in Cuba, and I won't mind or interfere or tattle. I'm not interested in you or your operations.

"I'm letting you alone, and I expect the same consideration from you. I won't let you or anybody else drive me off this island. That's not a challenge; it's a simple statement of fact. Any one who tries to drive me off this island will be—shot at; and I'm a good shot."

The old man from Skeleton Key stared at him malevolently. His eyes were vindictively narrowed. His jaws seemed to bulge. A vein grew large on each temple.

"I said—one week," he snapped, and started his outboard.

Tommy awaited developments. He took only one precaution—one against being surprised while he slept. With Blue's assistance, he rigged up a "prowler alarm," consisting of a length of fishline which ran about a foot from the ground from staples driven in trees in a circle about the cabin. Any one approaching the cabin from any direction must trip over or stumble against that encircling cord. One end of it was made fast; the other ran through a hole in the screen to the Spanish calfbell.

Blue and Tommy tested out the prowler alarm at sundry points. It was impossible to push against the string at any place without jangling the bell.

Tommy merely did not wish to wake up some night with a knife going into his throat, or with bullets pouring into his anatomy.

But the following days were uneventful. Tommy spent them lying in the sun, cultivating a rich sunburn, which quickly eased into a fine tan, in swimming, and in puzzling out the location of Captain John Varden's treasure.

An insignificant word in that old, old letter began taking on more and more significance. It was the word "regardless." A detached word, set between two sentences.

> . . . From this rock pace one thousand paces, even, in a proper northerly direction to a circle of smaller yellow rocks. *Regardless.* In the heart of this circle, dig.

Regardless, Tommy asked himself, of what? Regardless of the pass? Had

the pass existed then? If so, how could a man pace a thousand paces regardless of a dangerous, murderous stream of water? How could a man pace water that was, in places, twenty fathoms deep?

Tommy stood on the brink of Dead Man's Pass, and in a "proper northerly direction" estimated at what spot in the pass the thousandth pace would fall.

When he had guessed that location to his satisfaction, he motored to it in the Barracuda. He took the precaution of doing this between tides. There was no water running; the pass lay perfectly still.

Tommy lowered a lump of lead tied to the end of a line. He found bottom at sixty feet!

No man without costly diving apparatus could resurrect treasure from such a depth; but Tommy tried, anyway.

He borrowed grappling hooks from the Green Harbor storekeeper and spent two days dragging Dead Man's Pass in hopes of fouling with the hooks an iron chest. He was rewarded with two water-logged palm trunks.

The experiment was a failure. He dismissed the idea of well-insulated powerful electric magnets as fanciful. Again, costly equipment would be necessary.

It was toward the end of one of these fruitless afternoons that Tommy Varden became acquainted with the third inhabitant of Skeleton Key. The Barracuda was anchored in the pass. Tommy was lying out on the stern, peering down through the translucent jade-green water, when a voice, rich and melodious and southern, fell upon his ears.

"Don't pay no 'tention. Don't talk loud. But listen to whut Ah say, white man."

CHAPTER VII.

IN SIGHT OF SUCCESS.

TOMMY disobeyed these astonishing instructions to the extent of turning his head sharply and looking across a ten-foot space into the round, black, wrinkled face of an elderly colored woman. The sun gleamed through fuzzy, frizzy white hair upon a blue-black scalp. She wore coral pendants set in gold at her ears. She peered at him through the thick lenses of silver-rimmed spectacles. She wore a billowing snow-white dress. It was obvious that she was especially dressed for an important occasion. So comfortable and jolly did she look that Tommy involuntarily smiled. But she was not smiling.

She sat in a small black rowboat from the bows of which projected a bamboo pole with bright cork float and lead sinkers dangling. She was resting on the oars, gazing at him.

She said, in a conspirator's voice: "Ah's supposed to be fishin'—you understand, white man?"

"I understand," Tommy whispered.

She continued to stare at him, as if she were analyzing the uttermost recesses of his spirit. She finally sighed, as if with relief, and vouchsafed: "You look lak quality. You look lak a gemman."

"Thank you," Tommy breathed.

"You're the fust white man I've seen whut looks lak a gemman, in so long Ah don't know when de las' time wuz. You know who Ah am?"

Tommy slowly wagged his head. Wavelets gurgled under the Barracuda's hull. Hot sun beat down pleasant-

ly on the back of his head and neck. Its heat was offset by a fresh sea breeze. Every day he was feeling more like himself—more amiable. He continued to smile.

"Aunt Chloe. Dat's who I is."

"I see," said Tommy gravely. "I am Tom Varden."

"Pleased to know you, Misto Tom. Ah come out here to have a special talk with you. Ah works fo' Miss Joan."

"Miss Cable?"

"Yas, suh. Ah been waitin' on dat chile hand and foot ev' since she was three years old. Ah wants to talk to you 'bout her—'cause you're a gemman."

"You mean, she sent you out here with a message for me?"

"No, suh!" declared Aunt Chloe. "Ah come ob mah own free will without tellin' nobuddy. Ah's been watchin' you from de sho. Ah's been usin' marine glasses on you. And Ah finally said to myself: 'Chloe, dat's de man!'"

"The man," Tommy inquired with mild astonishment, "for what?"

"To git dat pore gal offen dat island—away from dat wicked ole man and away from dat Dirk Jellico. Dirk Jellico wants to marry her. And whut does she know 'bout men? Nuffin'! She ain't never had no chance to meet gemmen like you. She's met nothin' but dese wicked men."

Tommy thought of the motley assortment of men Joan Cable must have known—escaped convicts, wharf rats, the offscouring of the land and sea which made up the personnel of the rum trade.

"SHE'S never once stepped foot off dat island since dat wicked ole man brought her here, exceptin' to go fishin' and swimmin' and maybe walk around on dese other keys. Dat ole man watches her like a hawk, Misto Tom.

"If she tries to run away, he says he'll catch her and whip her black and blue. And if she did run away, she ain't got a friend or a relative to run away to. But she's got to run away."

"Because of this Dirk Jellico?"

"Yas, suh! He wants her. When he comes around, Ah gits scairt, the way he runs dem piggy eyes of his over her. Ah gits scairt and Ah wants to git her away. Ah've stayed awake nights, prayin' to mah Lawd to help her git away. And when I seen you, it was lak seein' an angel from heaven. 'Dis gemman,' I says, 'will help. He's quality.'"

Tommy could not get it out of his head that this talk of Aunt Chloe's was not as innocent as it sounded.

"I met Miss Cable," he said, "and it seemed to me that she was quite capable of taking care of herself. She certainly didn't strike me as being a simple, ignorant backwoods girl."

"But dat's jes' whut she is, Misto Tom!" Aunt Chloe exclaimed. "All she knows, she learned out o' books. She reads and reads and reads. She gets the fashion books and makes pretty dresses. She tries to make herself be lak de gals she reads about—de pore little lamb! And ev' since dat night she met you, she's been readin' nuffin' but love stories."

"Good Lord!" Tommy groaned.

"De ole man wants her out of his way. And he's scairt of Dirk Jellico. Dat's how de wind is blowin', Misto Tom. You know whut would happen to dat pore lamb if Dirk Jellico carried her off? Whut does she know 'bout life and cities? She never saw one! You don't want dat pore innocent lamb's life ruined, do you, Misto Tom. Tell me you'll git her offen dat island, git

her away from dat ole man and dat Dirk Jellico, and lemme go back home and give up thanks to mah Lawd."

Tommy Varden was feeling more and more uncomfortable.

"Aunt Chloe," he said sternly, "just what are you asking me to do?"

"Git dat pore lamb offen dat wicked island!"

"And then what? If she has no friends or relatives, what's to become of her? How can she support herself? There isn't any kind of work she's fitted for. Supposing I help her get ashore, what do I do with her next?"

"Misto Tom," Aunt Chloe evasively answered, "you saw dat lamb, didn't you? You saw her clear and plain, didn't you?"

"I did. What of it?"

"You saw her—and can you tell me you ever saw a mo' beautiful girl in all yo' bawn days?"

"I'll grant that she is a beautiful girl. But what of that?"

"Whut of dat?" gasped the black lady. "You lay there and ask me whut of dat? You mean to say a full-blooded young man lak you can look at Miss Joan and not want to marry her right away quick?"

"Aunt Chloe," said Tommy gently, "I think I understand the predicament you're in. You love Miss Cable. You'd lay down your life for her. You'd sacrifice anybody or anything to help her—including me. I admire you for such devotion, but I simply cannot be sacrificed."

"You mean, you won't git her offen dat island and—and marry her?"

"I'm sorry, Aunt Chloe; but that's what I mean."

The old colored woman looked at him with miserable eyes.

"You haven't had time to think it over, Misto Tom. Dat's it. Ah—Ah said too much at one time. Ah's gwine along now. Sho! Ah'd be all upset and mixed up, too. Ah don't blame you, Misto Tom. You jes' think it over. Remember! Miss Joan don't know nuffin' 'bout dis. It's jes' dat Ah knows de right man fo' her when Ah sees him. And you's dat right man, Misto Tom!"

Aunt Chloe began to chuckle softly and deeply. She bobbed her old head up and down. Evidently she was delighted with the conclusion she had reached.

She said nothing more, but rowed away, deft, clipped strokes surprising in one of her age. And Tommy, with mixed feelings, watched her go; watched the little black rowboat until it reached the eastern end of the island and vanished behind a thicket of palms.

HE presently hauled in his anchor and took the Barracuda around to Sunrise Cove. He was disturbed and puzzled. He hated all women, but the chivalry that was as much a Varden trait as his keen blue eyes was touched by Aunt Chloe's story of Joan Cable. How could he stand idly by and permit a girl of Joan Cable's obvious innocence and decency be drawn — or pitchforked — into some dreadful fate?

Tommy said "Hell!" softly as he made the Barracuda fast to the little pier. He wasn't a knight-errant, or a Don Quixote, either! He had stated his platform frankly to old man Cable: mind your business and I'll mind mine!

Very much against his wishes, Tommy Varden was becoming more and more involved with his strange neighbors on Skeleton Key. He had no wish to rescue damsels in distress, nor

to engage in private wars with suspicious, rum-running old men. If it were not for the treasure, he would accept Ben Tupple's urgent invitation to spend the rest of his Florida sojourn on Palm Key.

His thoughts turned upon the treasure. Frowning, he sat on the end of the little pier, stared unseeingly at the water, and, word for word, reviewed the contents of that letter. Time after time he stumbled upon that detached word *regardless*. Regardless of what? Regardless, undoubtedly, of Dead Man's Pass.

Supposing—Tommy's brain suddenly clicked with a fresh idea. Somewhere along about the six hundred and twelfth pace, the thousand-pace trail to the buried iron chest dipped down into Dead Man's Pass. It had occurred to Tommy that he might have been inaccurate in his guesswork.

Tommy picked up a spool of new fishline from a shelf in the cabin of the Barracuda, took it ashore, tied the end of the line to a palm tree, and, beginning at six hundred and twelve, counted to one thousand paces. The length of the paced line was greater than he had expected. He cut the line where the thousandth pace occurred, made a hand reel of it, and returned to the Barracuda.

He cast off, started the motor, and steered out of the cove and into the pass. At the point where the six hundred and twelfth pace came, he drove a stake into the sand. To this he tied one end of the fishline.

With the motor throttled down, he steered across the pass. The length of the line astonished him still more. He was presently in the shade of overhanging palms on the shore of Skeleton Key, and there was still forty feet of line left!

He had solved the riddle of that letter! One thousand paces—*regardless*.

The bow of the boat had grazed the sand. Tommy excitedly walked forward. Dead ahead was a dense thicket. There remained of the line about twenty-five feet. Twenty-five feet from here, would he find, if he dug down, Captain John Varden's iron chest?

FROM the heart of the thicket, as if by magic, the head and shoulders of a man were produced. Underbrush crackled. Old man Cable walked out onto the beach with his shotgun under his arm.

His lips were grimacing; his eyes were narrowed in menace.

"Mindin' your own business, are you?" he rasped. "Snoopin' and pryin' around, it looks like to me. What are you doing with that line?"

Tommy answered impudently: "Perhaps I was measuring the pass. Perhaps I was thinking of building a suspension bridge between your key and mine."

The old man did not return Tommy's hard smile. Tommy was watching him with catlike closeness. If Captain John Varden's treasure was buried somewhere in that thicket, and if old man Cable knew about that treasure, he would somehow betray it now.

But the old man only glared at him, and hefted the shotgun on his arm as if he longed to lift up its twin muzzles and blow the roof of Tommy Varden's head off.

"I knew I'd catch you up to some mischief," he said in that harsh, irritable voice. "I don't know what you're up to, but I do know you were lyin' when you said you were goin' to mind your own business. What I told you a week ago, holds. I mean busi-

ness, young fellow. If you aren't off that key by midnight to-night—" He lifted the shotgun menacingly and patted the blue barrels.

A wave of brighter color crept up under Tommy's sunburn. Now that he was certain, or fairly certain, that Captain John Varden's treasure chest was on Skeleton Key, the whole situation was altered. He had looked up the laws governing buried treasure; had ascertained that treasure found on any man's land belongs unreservedly to the finder. If he should find that treasure on Skeleton Key, it would be his by right of discovery and by right of inheritance. Yet how could he secure it? How could he make the opportunity to dig for it?

Old man Cable was watching him with suspicious, malevolent eyes. Old man Cable would certainly not be caught napping.

Tommy's helplessness made him furious. So angry that he was trembling, he retired to the cockpit, started the motor and backed out into the pass.

He shot a last look ashore as the stern swung around. Old man Cable was still watching him, one of his hands nursing the barrels of the shotgun, as if he longed to throw the butt to his shoulder and blow this spying young man to kingdom come.

CHAPTER VIII.

NIGHT MAGIC.

TOMMY made the Barracuda fast to the pier and walked, scowling, through the sand to the cabin. Blue was in the kitchen preparing supper. Tommy lounged in the doorway and watched his Man Friday dexterously mixing dough for baking powder biscuits.

"Blue," he said, "we're going to be driven off this key if we don't do something about it."

"Yas, suh; Ah reckon so."

"It would be a shame if we were driven off, Blue."

"Sho' would, Misto Tom."

"What are we going to do about it?"

The darky grinned. "Whut you say goes double wif me, Misto Tom."

"You willing to help me fight for our rights, Blue?"

The smile vanished. "Whut wid, Misto Tom?"

"We've got an automatic pistol and a thirty-forty rifle. Take your pick."

"Ah'll pick de pistol, suh."

"I think we're going to be raided to-night. I want you to understand something, Blue. We have a perfect legal right to this island. No one in the world has the right to drive us off. In putting up a fight if we're raided, we'll simply be defending our rights. Understand, Blue?"

"Sho! Whutever you say is de law to dis black man, Misto Tom."

Tommy retired to the porch to ponder the situation. He was still pondering when he heard, somewhere to the north, the unmistakable hum of a speedboat's engine. Now, Tommy was well acquainted with the hum of speedboat engines. He estimated that that boat was turning up forty-five or fifty knots.

As he had heard no such sounds in the week he had been on Friendship Key, his curiosity was aroused. As he walked through the sand toward the western beach, the vibration in the evening air came abruptly to an end. When Tommy reached the beach there was no boat in sight. From his feet the jade-green Gulf extended emptily to the horizon.

He glanced toward Skeleton Key. No boat was visible there. Puzzled, Tommy returned to the cabin. He had his supper. From the porch he watched the sunset—blazing crimson glory—and wondered if he would live to see another. Darkness fell with its customary haste.

He was deliberating whether it would be wise to attempt slipping ashore on Skeleton Key in the darkness, and digging for the treasure under cover of the night, when he heard the sound of creaking oarlocks, then the splash of oars. The sounds seemed to be coming from Sunrise Cove.

Tommy went into the cabin for his rifle, saw that the magazine was fully loaded, and walked cautiously down to the pier. In the faint light of early stars he made out the rowboat, perhaps a dozen feet from the end of the pier, gliding in toward shore. He removed his flash light from his pocket, crouched down behind a scrub palmetto and waited.

The rowboat reached shore. A pale figure arose and stepped out on the beach.

Tommy arose, held his rifle ready, and flashed on the light. Its beam fell brightly upon a slim, dark-haired girl in a blue dress and golden silk stockings. Her eyes sparkled in the white beam. She smiled nervously.

It took Tommy a moment longer to recognize her as the beautiful Miss Cable.

HE snapped off the light and walked toward her. In the faint starlight her face was a pale, formless blur.

She said in a timid voice: "You were expecting me."

"No," said Tommy.

She went on, rather mysteriously: "After the other night I thought you would be expecting me. I am sorry I said the things I did. I want to apologize."

"There is nothing to apologize for," said Tommy, and waited.

She relieved his curiosity slightly by saying: "I wanted to have a talk with you. Let's sit down here in the sand. In case any one comes, I want to be near the boat. I'm not supposed to be here. But I had to come. You see, I—I'm in a pretty desperate predicament. A man I hate has come to the island, and he says he's going to take me away with him in the morning."

"Dirk Jellico?" said Tommy.

Joan Cable gasped: "How did you guess?"

"I had a talk with Aunt Chloe this afternoon. She told me about Dirk Jellico. She told me a great many things."

The girl said nothing for a while. Tommy knew that she was trying to see his face.

"He kissed me," she said presently, in the same even, almost monotonous voice. "It was horrible. He and my grandfather had been drinking. Dirk has wet lips."

Tommy wanted to say: "Miss Cable, I am all sympathy, but what can I do? Is it fair to drag me into this?" He was quite certain now that Joan Cable and Aunt Chloe had cooked all this up between them; were determined that he should be the instrument of the girl's salvation from some ugly fate at the hands of this rum runner, Dirk Jellico. In his imagination Tommy pictured him, a brown, black-eyed giant, hairy and powerful—a sort of pirate king. But he was astonished when Joan Cable said:

"I was curious about you. There

are some things I don't understand. I mean, I don't understand much about life. There are a million things I want to learn. All I've learned I've read in books. Books aren't always true, are they?"

The question was so naïve that Tommy almost laughed. But he restrained himself and answered gravely:

"A great many of them exaggerate the truth, and some of them are downright lies."

"I thought so. I've read a great many love stories. Some of them sound truthful, and some sound like lies. I haven't met many men, but none of them make love the way men do in books. I don't like the way men look at me. I don't like the way Dirk Jellico kisses me. I feel sick all over. I want to wash my mouth out."

"The kind of men you meet," Tommy said, referring to the rum trade, "aren't apt to be the kind who make love the way the men do in the books you read."

"You," she promptly answered, "are the kind of man I read about in books."

TOMMY felt uncomfortable and embarrassed. This simple, innocent child of the wilderness was entirely too outspoken.

"I can't talk to men like Dirk. He always laughs at me when I ask questions—and he says vile things. I don't think you would laugh at me. I would like to ask you a million questions."

"I won't laugh at you," Tommy promised solemnly. "I suppose you want to know all about life and cities and love."

"First of all," said the clear, firm voice of Joan Cable, "I want to know why you hate women. It isn't just curiosity. You said the other night that you hated women so that you had come to this island to get away from them."

"It isn't much of a story," said Tommy. "What happened to me has been happening ever since men and women started falling in love with each other. I was engaged to a girl. I thought she would stick by me through thick and thin. My family was supposed to have left me a great deal of money. I came down with pneumonia. When I was discharged from the hospital, I found that the family fortune was at an end. When the girl found this out, she ran off with my best friend and married him. Over a period of years, I had lent that friend of mine a small fortune, but I never bothered to ask him for receipts for these loans. With the money I lent him, he went into Wall Street and cleaned up a fortune. But when I went to him and asked him to repay what he had borrowed, he told me he owed me nothing."

Tommy stopped. Joan Cable said:

"You ought to be glad that you found out the truth about both of them."

"I will be—in time."

"But you aren't bitter about her any more."

"How," Tommy inquired in surprise, "did you figure that out?"

"Because your voice stayed down. It didn't go up and down the way people's voices do when they are bitter."

"It seems to me," said Tommy, rather dryly, "that you know more about life than I do."

"You don't love her any more, do you?"

"No. It's all over."

Joan Cable uttered a deep sigh. Tommy recalled what Aunt Chloe had said, and his discomfort returned.

"You're quite certain that you will never fall in love again."

"Yes," said Tommy. "I'm dead certain."

"But you're young. You're only twenty-four or five. How can a man go through life without loving somebody?"

"This man is going to do it!"

"I think you're just hurt," said Joan Cable. "I think you'll get over it. Oh, I think it's horrible to feel the way you feel. But I don't think you really feel that way. I think you would fall in love to-morrow—to-night—if you met a girl you liked enough. Do you like me?"

"Very much," Tommy answered, and he hastened to add: "Aunt Chloe said you had never been on the mainland."

"My grandfather has never permitted me to go ashore. I have read every scrap I can find about cities. Isn't it funny—I haven't even the vaguest idea of what a city would be like; what the sounds would be like; how it would seem to be in the crowds; go to the theaters. It would be wonderful!"

Tommy looked off over the bay toward Green Harbor, his imagination suddenly engaged by a dangerous but fascinating picture. He was enjoying the picture of himself introducing this large-eyed girl to these sensations which she had never known. Her first walk down Fifth Avenue! Her first shopping tour! Her first musical comedy! Her first ride on a railroad train!

BUT he came down to earth when the sweet voice continued:

"It would be wonderful to go out into the world with some one I loved and trusted. It would be dreadful to go out into the world with a man I hated and feared. Tell me what cities are like. What is New York like?"

Tommy's imagination soared again. He loved New York. He loved Paris, London, Rome. He tried to give her a picture of New York—Fifth Avenue at five o'clock in the evening, when the lights were coming on, when the streets were crowded, jammed, with traffic and pedestrians. He told her about famous restaurants, about opening nights in theaters, about night clubs and Central Park. Then he took her to Paris and London and Rome.

When he paused she would say, in a soft, eager voice, "Go on!" Tommy would go on; and the dangerous picture again took form, of Tommy Varden revealing the world to Joan Cable. He saw her, eager eyed and smiling, adoring the world and adoring him.

What had Aunt Chloe said? "—You mean to say a young, full-blooded young man lak you can look at Miss Joan an' not want to marry her right away quick?"

Tommy put that picture out of his mind, likewise the picture of Joan Cable, slim and golden in the moonlight of the night she rescued him from the claws of Dead Man's Pass, of her proximity to him here in the darkness—eager and wanting love. His love! What did she know about love? She wanted a knight-errant, not a lover.

Yet Tommy was a little alarmed to realize that his capacity for love was by no means withered and dead as he had believed.

She did not help matters in the least when she said, in the dreamiest, most alluring voice: "It would be wonderful to be kissed by the man you loved, to have his arms around you, protecting you."

Tommy said nothing, but his brain

was busy enough. His brain was saying: "This is old stuff! Watch your step, buddy! Better men than you have fallen for flattery."

It seemed to him that she had moved closer to him. He was uncomfortably aware of her nearness. Her voice seemed to be at his very ear when she spoke again.

"What is it that makes people fall in love?"

"I don't know," said Tommy hastily. "Cynics say proximity—nearness. Let a man and a girl be near each other long enough, and they'll fall in love. That's what the cynics say. Of course that presupposes that, to begin with, the girl is attractive to the man and the man is attractive to the girl."

"Am I attractive to you?" asked the innocent child of the wilderness.

"You are very pretty," Tommy said. He felt very warm.

"Am I as pretty as other girls you've known?"

Tommy hesitated and answered honestly: "Prettier."

"Prettier than any girl you've known?"

"I—I guess so."

"Then why," she promptly asked, "aren't you falling in love with me?"

"Because," said Tommy bluntly, "I'm never going to fall in love with any girl again."

THERE was a long silence. Tommy's discomfort grew. Why didn't she have a little tact? Even with her inexperience, didn't she realize how embarrassing it was for a man to be asked questions like these?

It occurred to him presently that Joan Cable was weeping. Well, let her weep. He would not comfort her. Not he! Once he took her into his arms it would be all over.

Her voice, bleak and ghostly, cried: "What am I going to do? Dirk Jellico will take me away in the morning. I would rather die! You must do something! How can you let a thing like this happen?"

"What can I do?" Tommy asked in despair.

"You can take me away."

"Where?"

"New York — London — Paris— Rome!"

"But I am a poor man, you must remember. I haven't five hundred dollars in the world!"

"We can manage."

"You don't know the world."

"But you do!"

Tommy did not answer.

Joan Cable said: "I think life is cruel. I think life is horribly cruel. Girls don't talk like this to men. I am a fool to say it to you. It shows how ignorant I am. I thought that when one person fell in love the other did too.

"I fell in love with you the other night. It was just as if I'd always known you would some day come to this island. I love you. I'm not ashamed to say it. I love you, and I never could love any one else."

"Look here," said Tommy roughly. "You go back to that island and pack your things. Can you do it safely?"

"Yes," she gasped.

"You pack your things. Come back. I'll take you ashore. I'll put you on a train. I have a sister living in Washington. You can stay with her."

"And you'll be there, too?"

"No, I must stay here."

"Because you hate women?"

"Partly."

"And partly—" She hesitated. She jumped to her feet and stood look-

ing down at the uncomfortable young man. Tommy slowly arose from the sand. He said:

"You'll be glad—later, Joan."

"You're thinking of other men I'll meet," she said hurriedly. "You don't know. I've met them. All sizes and shapes of them. I'll never love any man but you."

SHE hastened to the rowboat and pushed off. Tommy followed her to the water's edge, trailing the butt of his rifle along in the sand. He couldn't think straight. He wanted to take Joan Cable in his arms. He wanted to taste her lips. But his mind was chaos. He was the man who, a week ago, had stepped upon this island, vowing never to know another woman as long as he lived.

He called—solely because he wanted to hear her voice again:

"Are you sure it's safe?"

"Quite safe. I'll be back in a half hour."

Joan was seated at the oars, evidently as reluctant to go as he was to have her go. He walked out on the pier. She would have to pass close.

"How many men did Dirk bring with him?"

"Eight or ten."

"Much booze?"

"I don't know."

"Did you hear them discuss me?"

"No."

She was rowing rapidly. Now he could see nothing but the white spots where the oars dipped in.

"Hurry back, Joan."

There was no answer. He stared into the darkness. What had he meant by that? Hurry back! To what? His arms?

"No!" cried Tommy fiercely. He visualized his sister's welcome of this sun-browned backwoods innocent: Elaine Varden, cold, aristocratic, unimaginative, conventional, narrow. What would Elaine do with her? When Joan's welcome was worn out, what would become of her? To whom would she turn then?

Cold moisture come out on Tommy's forehead. He had, in offering to help Joan Cable escape from Skeleton Key and Dirk Jellico, assumed a responsibility which would grow, as time went on, heavier and more and more complex.

To think he had been so certain that life on a lonely Florida key would be simple! He knew now that life would never be the same again. Joan Cable was the most vivid personality, the most appealing woman he had ever known. To marry her would be to upset every one of his calculations. Even as he tried to dismiss her eagerness, her slim loveliness from his mind, it continued to build pictures in which he saw himself and Joan Cable seeing New York and London, Paris and Rome, her face radiant, her eyes shining at the wonders of the world he was unfolding to her.

But even this fantasy was jarred from Tommy Varden's mind, when suddenly he heard the muted roaring of the speedboat.

As he listened the sound of the muffled powerful engine came closer. Blades of white light were suddenly stabbing across the cove. They flooded Tommy. He stood on the end of the pier, too startled to move, as the boat came sweeping in, four dazzling searchlights playing upon him like spotlights in a drama, the outcome of which no one—certainly not Tommy Varden—could predict.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

"I'll let old fogies like you worry about injuries," the youngster sneered at Pivot

On the Down Grade

"Slipping," said his teammates and the manager of the "pro" eleven—yet Pivot Hansen had a greater need to crash through than any of them knew

By BERTRAND L. SHURTLEFF

"HANSEN."

The big blond lad stepped forward and received the thin envelope that was held out to him. His scowl did not lessen as he pushed his way through the crowd, his blunt finger ripping open the gummed end of the offering and examining the crisp contents. Fifty dollars! And he had seen the time when they had begged him to sign on for two hundred a game.

"It hurts to hit the skids, buddy," muttered Baldy Horton, gripping his elbow with a friendly squeeze, "but this is a young men's racket. They want 'em right out of college with the rah-rah publicity still strong. In a couple of years they've no use for you."

Hansen laughed shortly and turned away. Baldy was an old hanger-on who was kept as a substitute because he could still play a good brand of football for a few minutes each game, and because he would work for little or nothing. When Baldy began to take

men by the elbow and draw them aside for sympathy their days were about over with the Mid-Western Terrors.

There was something more to "Pivot" Hansen's bitterness than the mere fading of fame and prestige. When he started to play professional football three years before it had been with the realization that the glory would be short-lived at best. It was the loss of the money that was bothering him, money that had been promised him, but had not been forthcoming.

"Another scrap of paper," he muttered, thinking of the contract that he had taken to Manager Kelly the week before, after finding an equally small sum awaiting him at the pay-off. "A fellow listens to their promises and forgets to read the fine print. Those contracts are made for the clubs, not the men."

He shook himself as he swung up the little walk to the flat. Arlene would be anxiously waiting and watching for him, eager to know that he was uninjured and to hear how he had played. He must get himself all set to explain why he had not started the game and why the roll was so thin. Pretty difficult thing to do, with the little lady looking at him steadily with those eyes that seemed to have grown big and questioning during the last few weeks.

"Not so good to-day, honey," he called, swinging his wife up in his strong arms. "Just a preliminary game, you know, and a small crowd. They haven't made the cut yet, so there were a lot of us to split it. I only got fifty."

There seemed to be pain in the big eyes that bored into his. He knew what that agonized look meant and longed to turn away, but her worried expression held him.

"But—but how will we meet the bills, dear? There are the instalments on the furniture and that beautiful coat you just would buy for me—and all the expenses in the spring."

He caught her little hands and squeezed them fiercely.

"Now, don't you go to worrying, little girl. The doctor said you were not to worry a single minute. I'll do all the worrying and see to it that things come out right in the end. The game'll pick up when we get to playing bigger teams, and a thousand dollars will see us sitting pretty. Run along and scrape up a bite for a starving man, and don't bother your pretty little head with such things."

IN spite of his admonitions, Pivot Hansen was worrying. His regular work with an insurance company would not have warranted marrying for years to come, and he had counted professional football a godsend when its extra income made union with Arlene possible. Counting heavily upon the words of Bill Kelly, he had furnished his home on the instalment plan, hoping to pay off his indebtedness from his football earnings. Now he realized that he could scarcely hope to retain the beautiful things that Arlene had chosen unless he could put his hands on a thousand dollars.

The loss of his household goods would bring disgrace upon him in more ways than one. His insurance company would frown upon his failure to maintain the establishment he had started, his father would condemn him for marrying so soon, and Arlene's people would be far from sympathetic. Somehow he must get that thousand dollars to tide the young couple over this threat and to put something aside for the big event in the spring.

By morning he was whistling gayly, and the next day found him ready with

the old enthusiasm for the evening practice. The sweaty togs felt good after the insistent cleanliness of his business clothing, and he longed to dash out and scrimmage fiercely in the crisp evening air, to fight for the position that he had held for the last two years and now saw slipping away from him.

It was maddening to stand around and watch the team run through signals while he warmed himself as best he could in a faded old green jersey. He was surly to Baldy and ready to pick a fight with anybody when Kelly finally told him to go in for "Express" Johnson, the youngster who was taking his place.

He ripped into the line with a vigor that brought grunts of protest from the shirkers on the squad. He dashed away on end runs with a speed and an abandon that he knew equalled his best. There was no stiffness in his knees, none of the lameness that others complained of feeling in thighs and calves.

When they turned to come up the field he fully expected to see Bill Kelly staring at him in surprise, but the derby hat was turned so that he could see the top of the crown as the manager conversed with Johnson and laughed in the same flattering manner that had been his attitude toward Hansen the year before.

"I'm at the best form I've ever been," Hansen told himself, "and I could beat that boy out for the position in a minute if I had half a show. Just wait until the first big game. The Twin-City Tornadoes will smash him to pieces."

The smashing failed to materialize. The Tornadoes were a good team and played a fine brand of football, but the Terrors were far superior, and Express Johnson had an easy time galloping around the ends behind perfect interference. Kelly swelled under the praise that was heaped on his new find and scowled when the fans began to shout for Pivot Hansen.

"Aw, go ahead in," he growled at last as it became evident that Johnson was tiring, "your friends want to see you, old-timer."

The bitterness of that taunt sent the big blond lad down the field on three successive jaunts for touchdowns. Cutting, reversing, pivoting, he swung out of danger with his old recklessness and had the stands howling his name time and again in the last few minutes of play.

HE was glowing with satisfaction when he reached for his envelope, after changing his clothes, but the smile died as he counted the contents. A scant ten dollar raise seemed poor pay for such an exhibition as he had turned in that afternoon.

"I want my release," he said, holding the excitement out of his voice as best he could and facing the sneering Kelly.

"And what do you want that for?"

"I might hook on with the Tornadoes. They're near enough so that I could play with them. Benson offered me one-fifty a game to play with them, if you would let me go."

"Fat chance," snorted Kelly. "Take what I'm givin' you, or go outlaw. The league won't let you play with another team until another year has elapsed."

Hot blood rushed to Pivot's head, and he longed to tell the cocky little runt just what he thought of him. One good tap from one of his great fists would suffice to make the insolent manager a little more considerate, but he must resort to no fist fighting. He must hold his job with the Terrors too,

must stave off the humiliation of losing that furniture until the last minute.

It took all of his self-control to turn away and slouch off for home, but he managed it somehow. He was even whistling when he rolled up the steps to Arlene.

"I heard that you played a wonderful game and that there was a fine crowd," she called as she came bustling out from the kitchen. "Dixie Nolan dropped in on her way home to say that you were marvelous. Big pay today, honey?"

"Not so big to-day, kiddo, but coming along. The club lost money last year and they're creating a sinking fund against emergencies. I did my stuff though, showed them I was still there. Nothing of the old man about your boy yet."

"Well, I should say not," indignantly. "Why, you're only a youngster, dear."

He chuckled at the realization that his switching the conversation to himself had made her forget to ask any more questions about the money. He dreaded to tell her just how little he had received, and did not feel able to evade those big questioning eyes concerning his status with the team. He was thankful, as he heard her clattering about in the kitchen, that she had decided that it caused her too much anxiety to see him play. She would not know the whole truth about the bitterness of those long hours on the bench until the season was over.

Somehow, he kept telling himself, he would manage to squeak through. He could stave off the instalments with partial payments and trust to luck for an extra big policy to cover the hospital and doctor's bills in the spring. It would be fine to have it all in the bank, especially with Arlene so prone to worry about things of that kind, but a man could only do his best.

Two more games slipped past, and he congratulated himself upon silencing Arlene on each occasion with some new excuse to account for the lack of big pay. He had a vague feeling that she was puzzling over it all and surmising some of the truth, but somehow he managed to keep cheerful in her presence and to exhibit pride in his playing. She must never know how he was suffering, for she had enough to worry her, and he must be man enough to bear his own burdens.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," she called gayly, poking her head in at the door. "A real surprise. Guess what."

"Couldn't guess in a thousand years."

"Something you've wanted for three years."

Suddenly he knew. By heroic measures he furnished a smile for the occasion, although he knew that it must be ghastly. "Not—not dad?"

"Just that, honey. Your dad has promised to come to see you play. He has heard so much about the professional game and about the Tigers that he has promised to come into town for the game. You can get us seats, of course?"

"Yeh, sure," he said, trying hard to be enthusiastic, but thinking of the impression his father would get—dear old dad, who had played for the old college in the days when men were men. He would never understand why his son sat on the bench and waited until the game was on ice before getting into it.

He wasn't so sure about getting comps either. Old Kelly was reputed to be bitter about handing out free seats to any one who was slipping down the

grade. That was why he hadn't insisted, the year before, when Arlene decided not to attend any more games.

His fears were realized the next night when he approached the truculent Kelly.

"So yuh want a couple o' good seats, eh? Why don't you ask for the clubhouse? You old has-beens are always whining around for something. No, the comps are all gone."

"Why, I wanted a couple," put in Johnson, who had overheard.

An oily smile spread across Kelly's face and he winked broadly. "Why, I'll see what I can do for you, boy. There may be a pair hangin' around somewhere for you."

PIVOT'S fists doubled and he had all that he could do to walk away quietly. He couldn't afford to hit the insolent little wretch, much as he ached to do it, and he stalked toward the ticket booth with an angry frown. He must dip into the slender little reserve that he had built up by denying himself desserts at his lunches, a reserve that was to have bought a little Christmas surprise for Arlene but must now go to buy seats from which his loved ones could watch his misery. Nor could he get them behind the team, where the comps were usually placed, since the demand was great and there was nothing left but those on the opposite side of the field.

Arlene would know that they were not comps, but he shut his mouth tightly and resolved to do no explaining. He would slip the tickets to his father at the last minute and let the whole thing come out at once. Meanwhile, he could do nothing but pray that he might get into the game in time to show them that he was still able to make ground. It would be easier for Arlene to know that his loss of prestige was undeserved than to have her think that he had really lost the dash and fire that had been his in college and in the professional game.

The invading Tigers were unusual in professional football. Owned by the community instead of by a few individuals, they came with a host of rooters as enthusiastic as college followers. Their band was equipped in flashing orange, and played with a verve that no professional company could duplicate. There were cheers from hundreds of lusty throats, and songs that did credit to their leaders.

Since the club was run for pleasure instead of profit, the best players in the country were recruited for its ranks and never had their goal-line been sullied until Pivot galloped across it two years before to establish a Terror superiority that he had maintained for two seasons.

Now he sat on the side-lines, a dejected little hunch of green blanket, while twenty-two men danced up and down in nervous anticipation of the kick off. He was acutely aware, even in his misery, of the way in which loyal little Arlene, in her ignorance of true conditions, was explaining to dad how he was being saved until they needed him.

He hated himself, during the long minutes of preparation, for not having told her. It would have been more kind to have prepared her for this, he saw, than to have left her to puzzle it all out, up there with dad and his insistent questions.

The ball was kicked and soared deep into Green territory. He felt a little twinge of delight at the assurance with which that Orange horde poured down and smothered the man who had received it. Johnson would find no easy

going around those ends and between those massive linemen. This would test the interloper to the fullest.

Suddenly he wanted to see the green-clad Terrors licked, to see that Orange eleven pile up touchdown after touchdown in an ignominious parade that would prove to the world just how incapable Bill Kelly was as a manager. Let the public see what playing the fair-haired boy with his material meant against a good club.

Johnson tried a dart off tackle, but was smothered by an ambitious guard. His attempted circling of the end lost three yards. The Terrors kicked on the third down and sent the ball a little past midfield.

The Orange juggernaut started with its old accustomed power. First down after first down reeled steadily off as thrusts netted four or five yards off tackle every time they carried the ball.

Only a fumble saved the Terrors from a touchdown, a fumble that came on the three-yard line. No time for running the ball now, where loose handling would result in score for the Tigers, so the Green punted again.

ONCE more that drive came rolling down the field. The power of it held the home stands breathless, while the Orange rooters howled in glee. Down, down they drove, until a fifteen-yard penalty for holding cost them so much yardage that their quarter took to the air with a pass that grounded behind the goal line for a touchback.

Putting the ball in play on their own twenty-yard line, the Tigers attempted a run that was stopped, and a desperate pass that was grounded. Then they kicked again and tried hard to solve the crushing attack before disaster swamped them.

The whole of that quarter was the same. The Tigers pushed desperately forward and the Terrors fought despairingly back.

The second quarter opened with the ball still deep in Green territory and no score recorded.

Pivot's hands clenched until the nails dug into the flesh. He could see just how the Orange tackle was playing, how he was unbalanced on that end run in his eagerness to get the tackle. A quick cut-back would find an opening inside of him and a chance to show broken field ability.

"Johnson doesn't see his chance," he howled, gripping Kelly by the shoulder. "Let me get in. Let me carry it. I'll rip 'em wide open."

"Aw, dry up," snapped the manager, shoving him aside. "Give Johnson a chance and stop this eternal panning. I'm sick of you. You get your release to-night. You're a trouble-maker, Hansen."

The big blond lad reeled away. Many in the stands had heard. Men were jeering at him, the very men who had cheered him and adored him for two years and poured their adulation out before him. He had no eyes for the fine points of the game now. All that he wanted was to see that Orange drive go over the goal line.

Johnson kicked and took his time about it. A big end leaped into the air, meeting the ball with his chin. The oval bounded behind the goal line and into the end zone as frenzied players scrambled after it.

"Safety," bellowed the megaphoned announcer, after a consultation with the head linesman. "Two points for the Tigers."

The Terrors' punt was high and long, but the run back was good; and that Orange attack was varied now by

passes. Again the ball dropped into Green territory with an unfailing insistence.

"Put in Hansen; we want Pivot Hansen," called the stands.

Kelly reached down and picked up a fistful of pebbles, playing with them nervously. His ugly mouth twitched as he stared in an assumed impassivity at the game.

Again a break saved a touchdown, and again Johnson kicked. This time the other end met the ball before it had fairly left the foot and again it hurtled across the goal line and into the end zone before the charge of a half dozen frantic players.

"Another safety against the home team," bellowed the megaphone. "Score: Tigers, four; Terrors, nothing."

"One touchdown," pleaded Kelly as the boys ran past the bench. "A hundred dollars for the man who makes a touchdown. We can't afford to lose this game, boys. It might mean the championship."

There was no further scoring that half, but when the squad poured into the clubhouse Kelly met them with a wheedling promise.

"You ain't doin' your stuff, boys," he coaxed, "but I'm going to make it worth your while. We want that championship and we're going to make you want it too. If we sew this one up, they'll never beat us in the return match.

"You all know Jim Miga, the big boy with the rocks, who backs this club. He offers a ten per cent bonus for every man on the squad if you win and a five hundred dollar plum to the man who makes the first touchdown. How's that for an offer?"

Hansen muttered scornfully under his breath the refrain that the opponents of pro football had started in the newspapers:

> "We play the game for glory, for we all hate bad defeats;
> We play the game for glory—and—the dear old gate receipts."

NOBODY took any notice of him, and his anger began to cool. He almost felt ashamed for his disloyalty to the team. After all, it was scarcely fair to wish for the defeat of all of them, just because he had fought out with the manager.

"There's a hole inside of tackle on that end run from punt formation," he found himself telling Johnson. "If you cut back quick you can slide through. I fooled that same fellow last year half a dozen times, and you can see from the bench that he's off balance."

"*I* can't see a thing from the *bench*," drawled Johnson with nasty emphasis. "I'm in the game, not on the bench."

Hansen flushed, but went on quietly: "I noticed that you lost your temper a bit and went high when they tackled you the last time. Don't leap like that when they box you, but dive for their legs. You'll make a couple more yards that way and save yourself a nasty fall."

"I ain't worryin' about injuries," snapped Johnson testily. "I'll let you old fogies worry about them. My bones ain't brittle yet."

"No, but those Tigers are tough men and they tackle hard. Better think it over and choose the safest way. You can't gain any ground that way."

"No, but I can get my knees in somebody's chops, and the next time they'll let me leap over. Watch my smoke this half."

"Aw, leave him alone, Hansen," called Kelly. "Shut your face, or

strip off that uniform. You tryin' to break the boy's spirit!"

Again Pivot struggled to suppress that insane desire to tear his manager to bits. Without a word he turned and walked out of the clubhouse, to wait for the squad in the cool air before trotting out to the bench.

Johnson took the kick-off and started a mad dash. Straight down the center of the field he came, where Orange jerseys were sifting through ineffective interference and closing upon him. Three huge bodies cupped together to bar his way, but he hurtled straight at them.

With a laugh of defiance that was plainly audible through the hushed stadium he leaped high in the air, his knees thrust viciously forward toward the chin of the center giant.

The great lineman ducked expertly and shot up a great hand to seize an ankle. The runner pitched, head first, to earth, while the other players leaped upon him.

Time was called and an anxious trainer rushed onto the field with the inevitable brown bag. Water went on too, and Kelly chewed a cigar viciously as he paced up and down the sidelines.

"Pivot Hansen, we want Pivot Hansen," howled the old rooters, who had not forgotten their favorite. "Take him out; take him out."

There was a look on Kelly's face that would have denied them, but the trainer signaled for a substitution. Two men lifted the inert Johnson and bore him tenderly toward the bench.

"Don't take him off," howled Kelly. "What is it?"

"Broken clavicle and dislocated shoulder," said the trainer laconically.

Hansen leaped up and tugged at his sweat shirt. His heart pounded with joy at this chance to show his ability.

"Simpson," called Kelly, "go in for Johnson."

"Boo-o-o!" roared the crowd. "Give us Pivot Hansen. We want Pivot Hansen. What's the matter, Kelly? Afraid he's good and will show your pet up? Why can't we have Hansen? We want to see a game."

The quarter sped away. The lone figure at the end of the bench hunched forward, his eyes upon the play. The Tigers were still ripping deep into Terror ground, to lose the ball inches from the goal-line. With a deadening repetition the Green was kicking, kicking, kicking, always from a desperate spot and always with the opposing linemen missing the ball by inches.

"Those ends are pinching in," muttered Hansen.

HE felt a touch on his shoulder and looked up quickly. The boys had been avoiding him since Kelly had started riding him. It was a case of every man for himself, and nobody cared to incur managerial displeasure by siding with a has-been.

It was Jim Miga who stood beside him, the Jim Miga who was reputed to be behind the Terrors.

"What's the matter with you, Hansen?" he asked.

"Nothing, Mr. Miga."

"You haven't slowed up?"

"I'd like a chance to show I haven't!"

An understanding look glinted in the deep gray eyes as Miga turned away.

"Simpson is down," called some one. "Give us Hansen now."

The substitute was really out with an injured ankle and Kelly was looking along the bench for some one to take his place. The league ruling against carrying too many men on the roster had cut into his numbers severely and

two backs had been injured before this game. There was nobody left but the big blond lad.

"Henry," he called to a tackle, "go in for Anderson and shift him into the backfield. He can get through."

Hansen had already taken off his sweat shirt. Now he laughed audibly above the hush and sat down. Kelly heard the laugh and glowered.

Anderson dropped back to punt on the first down. With the deliberation of his race he turned the ball over until the lacings were uppermost before he dropped it. An Orange flash collided with it and sent it bounding.

The stands gasped and held their breath as men leaped for it. It was still yards from the goal-line, and recovery by the Terrors meant another hope of kicking clear of danger.

A Green halfback slipped under a big Orange end and curled around the oval. It was the Terrors' ball and second down.

Time had been slipping away. The game was nearly over and Pivot saw little Arlene and his huge old dad begging for him to get into the game. Even if he could not run with his old abandon, he could still kick better than any man on the club.

Again the ponderous Anderson waited and again he rolled his lacing upward. This time it was a guard that met the ball, hugged it in his stomach, and then lost it as he fell.

The mad scramble untangled to reveal the ball still in possession of the Green, although they were almost at their own goal-line now.

Once more the big Swede waited with his great hands outstretched for the ball. Once more he started to turn the oval, to be tackled one foot in advance of the line by the frenzied Orange.

"Send in Hansen! We want Pivot Hansen!"

"A thousand dollars for a touchdown," called Kelly above the roar. "I'll give a thousand dollars to the man who makes a touchdown."

They were lining up again, the gawky tackle still back to kick.

"Hansen!"

The boy leaped. Then wilted again. It was Jim Miga who had called.

"Get in there and save this game."

Without waiting for Kelly to make a remark he sped onto the field. No time for headgear now. He must get there before another blocked kick could be turned into a safety or a touchdown.

The linesman's horn cut into the roar of delight from the rooters. The shrill whistle of the referee echoed and a tense center stood erect over the ball to grin encouragement back at Pivot.

Fourth down, twenty yards to go. The ball on the Green's one-foot line. The score four to nothing.

HANSEN knew it all as he poised there for the pass, his mind functioning perfectly now. The halves far down the field in anticipation of the punt that was sure to come; the ends in close to make a mad dash upon him; the fullback up in the line of scrimmage to make the block certain.

Even as the ball came back he knew that he had plenty of time. He extended his arms at full length, the ball held easily, just above the level of his right shoulder. With aggravating slowness he took his preliminary step straight at that onrushing Orange line that was closing upon his toe and the ball.

A groan went up from the stands. The idol of the regulars was as slow as that awkward Swede had been.

Where was the old dash and spirit? Was he throwing the game because of the shabby treatment he had been receiving all season?

All of this flashed through the minds of hundreds of men in that long minute while he poised as if waiting. Then they saw why he had been so slow.

Not until the ends and tackles had committed themselves in one centralized rush did he show his intention. Then he stepped nimbly aside and started swiftly forward, far to the right.

It was a daring thing to do. Ten yards behind his own goal-line he started, with twenty yards to gain after he reached his scrimmage line. But there was no one to stop him, except the two halfbacks and the quarter, who were racing down upon him.

Too late his ends realized what he was attempting. The backs had all sprinted past them before they could think to wipe them down. Rapidly the three closed in upon the flitting Hansen.

His legs had never worked so rapidly before. Like a greyhound he sped over the goal-line, the five yard stripe, the ten, the fifteen. At the next ribbon of white a half met him with a driving tackle. The stands sank to seats again as that hundred and fifty pound player lunged with deadly certainty. Then they were up again as Pivot leaped nimbly aside and raced down the field almost parallel with the other halfback for fifteen, twenty yards more.

He was nearing the sideline now and the halfback was driving him out of bounds. Nearer the center of the field the quarter was racing madly to get in position to gather him in when the half failed.

Straight for the sideline Pivot went, with the speed of an unencumbered sprinter. He felt the joy of running, of leaving sprawled men behind. The wind was cool as it whistled past his hot face.

The half dived as he neared the forbidden sideline. With a sudden mustering of all his reserve strength and skill, Hansen stopped in his tracks and let the body sprawl on the turf. Then he was off again, running on another long slant to avoid the quarter.

Men were coming from behind, orange-shirted men who refused to go down before frantic Greens who would have protected him. Hansen went into his famous pivot as a huge lineman leaped with open arms.

The force of his turn sent him reeling toward the quarter. He was past midfield now, and the ball was in Orange territory for almost the first time during the game. If he could avoid that determined little safety man he might even reach the goal-line unimpeded.

He tried a dodge, but the quarter was too alert. The pounding of feet behind made him hasten. The compact body of the opponent still barred the way.

With a laugh that carried above the roaring of the frantic crowd, he dived for the little fellow's legs, one arm clutching the ball.

The stands groaned, but he was not down yet. With a great heave he was erect and in a staggering run, the quarter on his back. He had thrust his head between the little chap's legs and heaved him upward, where he clutched frantically for balance and in an effort to stop his impromptu steed.

On and on pounded the Orange pursuers. They were fleet men and his lead was all too short. There were twenty yards left, fifteen, ten.

The time-keeper's whistle shrilled as the quarter back slipped down and clung to a leg. Hansen yanked and tugged. The game was over as soon as his advance stopped. He must make those extra ten yards, *must* make them.

He was free, but staggering. The Orange piled onto him, seemed to swarm over him.

The referee lifted his whistle, but did not blow. Four Orange men were piled on the five-yard line and a weary Green ball-carrier was rolling over the line.

AFTER the shouting, yelling mob had drifted away, and the team were tossing damp towels around in the locker room and trying to pull on tight stockings over wet feet, Kelly stopped and leered at Hansen.

"Well, I guess you stay on," he said. "And we may sweeten it a bit."

"I guess I don't stay on," said Pivot. "I have witnesses to your statement that I'm released to-night. I'll just collect my pay and that thousand you promised for a touchdown, and then I'll kiss this place good-by forever. They offered me three hundred a game to play with the Tigers for the rest of the season—and just wait until I meet you birds."

Miga had been standing quietly at one side, but he stepped forward in the hush that followed.

"Did you accept their offer?" he asked.

"No, but I think I will. They're going to get me transferred to that district for my insurance."

"Since you haven't accepted, I want to make you an offer on my own account. I will give you five hundred a game to be player-manager of this outfit. You can have your own lawyer write up the contract and make it as tight as you want it for the next three years. I want football players, not college reputations; and I want a man instead of a skunk to handle things."

Hansen opened his mouth to answer, but the roar that went up from the other members of the squad silenced him. With a gasp of delight he struggled away from them to carry the news to the anxious girl and the tall old man who were waiting outside.

THE END.

The Death-Tree of Pula Tega

IN the China Sea is a group of small islands called Pula Tega; few boats have ever ventured through the jagged reefs and white water to land there, but one or two daring sea captains who reached the outer island found it white with the skeletons of birds and small animals.

A variety of upas tree grows there and the seed vessels are natural traps for every living thing that touches them. These seed vessels are full of sharp, curved hooks which not only hold fast after piercing the skin, but are full of an adhesive gum as sticky as fly-paper. A bird alighting on the tree finds the tips of its feathers fast and in struggling to release them is gradually drawn into the deadly embrace of the vegetable monster and soon dies. Bones of sea birds as large as the albatross were found beneath the trees.

Minna Irving.

"Git back!" Matt Woodruff commanded in a terrible voice

The Hawk of Hazard

A gentleman's honor was something Southerners fought and died for—and no man prized his more, in those turbulent Eighteen-Fifties, than Allan Campbell, the Mississippi Hawk

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LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ALLAN CAMPBELL, Mississippi gentleman, has been adventuring for several years with his enormous slave Tangle-eye. His extreme sense of gentlemanly honor, his disregard for danger, and his deadliness with the pistol have won him a wide but unfair reputation; all the river, in these antebellum Eighteen Fifties, knows him as the Mississippi Hawk.

Brought to Belle Point, Arkansas, under false pretenses by Fred Ginter, pseudo gentleman and saloon owner, Campbell nevertheless feels obligated to carry out his fraudulently obtained pledge to start a race in favor of Ginter's horse. But the other owner, Irene Claybourne's father George, gets the drop on Campbell. The Hawk, glad to be freed from his distasteful duty, calls off his slave, Tangle-eye, who was about to leap on Claybourne, and he starts the race fairly. Ginter's

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horse is beaten. Claybourne offers the Hawk satisfaction on the field of honor, but Campbell says he is satisfied. Ginter plans revenge; and he has many tools, such as the Oklahoma bad man, Purse Venier, who has already had a set-to with Claybourne's brother-in-law, the gruff frontier gentleman, Matt Woodruff.

Twice the Hawk has been accused of cheating at cards: once by Irene's jealous suitor, Lieutenant Metcalff, whom the Hawk refuses to fight because he is drunk; and once by Laurence Stevens, a cotton gin owner whom Ginter has blackmailed to the door of ruin. The Hawk, realizing Stevens is trying to commit suicide, finds out the cause, and offers him money to pay off Ginter's claims.

The next day the Hawk is arrested for murdering the plantation owner, George Claybourne.

CHAPTER X *(Continued).*

THE DUELLING PISTOL.

THE court room the next morning was filled with a crowd of excited people. As Campbell was led in, the buzz of conversation took on a sharper hum. He surveyed the sea of faces calmly as he took the seat indicated to him. Down near the railing which separated the public from the principals in the inquest, he observed the oily countenance of Fred Ginter. The saloon owner seemed to be eying him in a sort of malevolent gloating.

Campbell recognized other faces here and there of people he had met, but his eye encountered no friendly glance. He was alone in the midst of hundreds whose very thoughts were antagonistic to him.

The first witness was Matt Woodruff, who told of finding Campbell's card and Claybourne's note, and the subsequent discovery of Claybourne's body. Metclaff took the stand after Woodruff. The letter and calling card were placed on a table before the railing of the jury box.

To the Hawk's surprise, Ginter was the third witness called. His testimony was most astounding. In it the saloon man actually transcended himself in his social attempts, displaying a trace of Machiavellian cunning. By a candid admission of his fraudulent intentions he carried himself far in the graces of all honest men present.

"I want to admit," he said sorrowfully, "that I did hire Allan Campbell to come to Belle Point to see that my horse won the race which was run yesterday. It was a cheating trick to play, but my horse had lost twice, and I was anxious for him to beat Claybourne's filly. I am ashamed and sorry. Indeed, I am distressed at the way matters have turned out. I shall never cease to blame myself for what has happened. Henceforth I shall be at the command of Miss and Mrs. Claybourne to do all in my power to serve them. But how could I foresee that murder would be the outcome of a mere horse race?"

"Stick to the matter at hand, please," admonished the coroner shortly. "Relate the conversation you overheard yesterday between the prisoner and the deceased."

Ginter did so, giving a fairly accurate account of what had been said at the race track when Claybourne had offered to meet the Hawk on the field of honor.

"But Campbell refused," he went on. "Later, when no one was present to know anything about the matter, he

must have perfected his plans for the deed and then sent for Claybourne in the dead of night, knowing that the latter was too honorable to refuse to come."

At this point Campbell, who had listened silently to the testimony of each succeeding witness, arose to address the bench.

"I object to the theorizing on the part of the witness," he said in a precise voice. "As I seem to be more or less on trial at this inquest, I demand that it be properly conducted."

"Objection sustained," rapped out the coroner briskly.

The sheriff took the chair, told of the missing pistol which Campbell had admitted to be his. The gun taken from Claybourne's lifeless hand and the duelling case of the Hawk were added to the papers on the table.

AS the sheriff stepped down, Campbell again rose to his feet. With a languid hand he indicated the evidence on the little table. Almost contemptuously he addressed the room at large, coldly surveying the faces of all the principals one at a time.

"If this is a little conference to rush me to the gallows," he said disdainfully, "it strikes me as being a flimsy case. I have followed all the testimony thus far, an interesting story to me, I assure you. I admit nothing, understand. But even granting what has been said to be true, all you have established is a motive for a quarrel between the dead man and myself, and that we met in an affair of honor. Why this blatant howl of murder? Since when has it become murder for two gentlemen to shoot out their differences?"

His cold voice ceased as he hurled this query. For a moment there was silence following his speech. Then there was a low moan from Irene Claybourne. She burst into tears and buried her face on her uncle's shoulder. Campbell stared at her in amazement. Her action was most puzzling. More than that, it moved him strangely. Inwardly he winced at the cry of grief which had been wrung from her lips.

He had been indifferent to the trial, as indifferent as though he were a remote observer on another planet. But he could not be indifferent to the tears of Irene Claybourne. She stirred him more profoundly than any other woman he had ever known.

Coroner Fungall's voice answered him, cutting through his emotion like a surgeon's knife, laying bare the cause of Irene's queer cry, and shocking Campbell into perception of his vital danger.

"There is no murder in a fair duel," Fungall said in a chilled voice. "But what have you to say to the fact that the killed man's pistol lacked a charge of powder?"

"I beg pardon?" exclaimed the Hawk, starting.

"Lieutenant Metclaff," called out the coroner. "Take the stand again."

Grimly the officer took the pistol from the table and went to the witness stand.

"This is the same cap that was under the hammer when Mr. Woodruff and I found the body of the murdered man," he declared firmly. "Upon examination we found that the ball remained in the barrel of this pistol. At first I took it for a misfire, as did Mr. Woodruff. However, the cap had exploded perfectly. In the presence of Mr. Woodruff I removed the ball and found that it had been rammed home on nothing but wadding. *Not a single grain of powder had been used to make*

a charge for this pistol. It was as useless as a stick of wood. As helpless as a baby George Claybourne faced his death in what he thought was a fair duel. The man who shot him down was a murderer in cold blood."

"Worse than a murderer," agreed Fungall with an ominous glint in his eye. "The man who loaded that pistol violated all the ethics of honor, giving his victim no chance whatever for his life. Such a man is a vile disgrace to mankind and a curse to the mother that bore him. Consider yourself answered, young man. Now, have you anything to say?"

CHAPTER XI.

INNOCENT OR GUILTY?

At this astounding report on the part of the cavalry officer a buzz of horrified astonishment filled the court room. The assemblage, composed of a mixture of cotton planters and cattlemen, reacted as a single man to this shocking revelation. For dishonor was dishonor to Southerners and Westerners alike. The buzzing rose to a threatening murmur. Then a man's voice, which Campbell recognized as that of Ginter's man, Crouder, shouted above the crowd.

"That's all we need to know. C'mon, men, let's lynch him!"

And the murmuring swelled to a sullen roar. Men rose to their feet with murderous impulse, needing but a firebrand as a leader, and Crouder supplied this need. He was standing on a bench at the rear of the room, now, waving his arms and exhorting the aroused men about him to violence. The coroner splintered his gavel on his desk unheard and unheeded.

Shoulder to shoulder, cotton planter and cattleman, merchant and mountaineer, listened to the shouting Crouder with willing ears.

Allan Campbell's quick eyes sought the figure of the saloon owner. Ginter sat impassive in the witness box. It was obvious that he was taking no active hand in the affair either way. But Campbell knew he was directly responsible for the entire performance. Fred Ginter had planned the death of George Claybourne and the implicating of Campbell. It was a deed in the nature of revenge, revenge on Claybourne for beating his horse, and a diabolical revenge on Campbell for failing him, and for having insulted the plebeian saloon owner.

Campbell smiled bitterly. He realized how completely Ginter had him in the hollow of his hand. The fellow had entangled him in a web of circumstantial evidence. It was not that Campbell had been fool enough to underrate the capacity of the man; he had simply taken it for granted that he and Ginter were quits.

It was too late for vain regrets. He did not attempt to answer the coroner, to refute the charge against him, in the uproar. He smiled disdainfully, and, placing his back to the judge's desk, awaited the outcome with folded arms. Like the gentleman, like the supreme gambler he was, he was playing this crooked, losing hand dealt him by Fate, as coolly as he had always played the winning ones—silently and without complaint.

IRENE CLAYBOURNE caught at her throat with both little hands.

"Oh!" she cried out in vivid fear. "They're going to hang him!"

"It's only justice!" snapped Metcalf.

At that moment the railing separat-

ing Campbell from the mob gave way from the pressure of many bodies. With wild shouts frenzied men swarmed toward the calmly waiting Hawk.

"Uncle Matt!" Irene screamed, turning from the indifferent lieutenant to her relative. "Uncle Matt, they're going to hang him!"

Woodruff was already on his feet as the girl cried out to him. With one lithe jump he vaulted the low railing before him and leaped for Campbell's side.

"No, they ain't, girl, by thunder!" he shouted harshly.

Jerking out his six-shooter, which he wore as part of his garb in his everyday clothes, he leveled it on the foremost man.

"Git back!" he commanded in a terrible voice. "The first man to lay hands on Campbell dies at his feet. Bruce! *Bruce!* You jelly-kneed sheriff, pull your gun an' stand beside me. Git back, you crazy varmints! By thunder, this is a Claybourne affair personal. We'll conduct this here funeral our own way."

Metclaff laid one hand on the girl's trembling shoulder.

"You are quite right, Miss Claybourne," he said briefly. "I was crazy for a moment. Forgive me."

Without waiting for an answer he leaped over the railing and took his place on the other side of the Hawk with drawn saber, his blade describing a glittering circle and coming to rest at present.

Woodruff flashed him an approving glance, then raised the muzzle of his gun and fired twice at the ceiling. As the echoes died away and the other noises lessened, there was a commotion at the door. Down the main aisle, his great arms working like flails as he cleared a path before him, came the monstrous Tangle-eye. He crushed men to one side or the other with the irresistibility of a cyclone. Following close behind him was a wild-eyed Laurence Stevens.

Fungall found another gavel in one of the desk drawers and started an imperious drumming on the bench. The tumult subsided as Woodruff bellowed out the command for silence in no faint voice. Sheriff Bruce remained on guard at the door. Crouder had disappeared. The plot, for the present, had failed. Tangle-eye reached his master's side and gathered the protesting Campbell tenderly in his arms and felt of him anxiously for any injuries, the tears streaming down his black face.

"Thar," announced Uncle Matt truculently. "By thunder, we're the people, an' we must be respected. Now we'll go on with this business. Campbell, what you got to say in your defense?"

"Wait!" cried out Laurence Stevens in a clear voice. "I've got a lot to say right here, right now."

Ginter arose in his seat and pointed his finger at the gin owner.

"Stevens!" he thundered. "You get out of here!"

"You!" Woodruff bellowed at the irate Ginter. "*You* sit down before I shoot your whiskers off. By thunder, there's been enough disorder here for a year."

STEVENS crossed over and spoke rapidly in Campbell's ear. The latter nodded in answer to a question, and Stevens smiled triumphantly. Campbell turned and addressed the coroner.

"Your honor," he said, "I do not have any proof to offer as yet to point out the person guilty of this crime. All

that I can do at this moment is to establish my innocence. Instead of taking the stand at this point I demand the right to call upon and question the witnesses in this case."

Fungall hesitated at the irregularity of this proceeding.

"Damn it," snapped Woodruff testily. "The man is practically on trial for his life. Let 'im do it, Amos Fungall."

Fungall rapped the desk smartly with his gavel.

"Granted," he said hoarsely. "Call your witnesses."

"Matthew Woodruff!" said Campbell crisply.

The old man looked at him in surprise, but he marched to the witness stand without speaking.

"Mr. Woodruff," he began in a clear, concise voice, "you were summoned by the Claybourne family at what hour Tuesday morning—yesterday morning, it was?"

"About ten o'clock," answered Woodruff readily.

"Was George Claybourne alive and well the preceding night, Monday, at ten or eleven o'clock?"

"He was," stated Woodruff.

"Is this fact established, sir?" Campbell turned to the coroner.

"It is," husked the latter. "Get on."

"And you, accompanied by reliable witnesses, found the slain man Tuesday evening at dusk?" the Hawk demanded of his witness.

"Exactly," nodded Matt.

"And, having found the calling card of the accused man and the last message of the deceased when you looked in the latter's desk Tuesday morning, you established beyond all question the fact that George Claybourne met his death some time between midnight Monday and noon Tuesday, did you not?"

"It must of been at about the time stated on the visitin' card," agreed Woodruff. "Fungall, there, said George had been dead about twelve hours when he examined him at seven o'clock last night."

"Is this fact clear?" Campbell demanded of the coroner.

"Yes," rapped the official with his gavel. "Now, what?"

"Witness dismissed," announced Campbell. "Mr. Laurence Stevens!" Woodruff resumed his seat beside his niece, and the gin owner took the stand.

After the customary formalities the Hawk addressed his first question to the most recently arrived witness.

"Are you acquainted with the accused man?" he began impersonally.

"Considering the short time I have known him, exceptionally well," responded Stevens gravely.

"Where were you Monday night?"

"Going over my affairs in my gin building at the south end of Piccadilly Street."

"Were you alone?"

"No. The accused, Allan Campbell, was with me there until three o'clock in the morning."

"Where did you go from there?"

"I went home to go over the balance of my private papers with Mr. Campbell. We were together from nine o'clock Monday night until nine o'clock Tuesday morning. Our business transacted, my mother and sister joined us at breakfast. Mr. Campbell left my house at nine o'clock."

"CAN any one corroborate your story?"

"My mother knew that I was coming home Monday night. She heard us enter the house that night. Of

course, she saw Mr. Campbell at the breakfast table. She will be willing to testify if necessary."

"You'll answer to me, Laurence Stevens," snarled Ginter furiously. "I'll attach your property to-day, you liar!"

Stevens stiffened and clenched his fists.

"You'll go with me to my lawyer's office as soon as I leave this inquest and I'll pay off every damned mortgage you hold. Then, sir, you'll apologize for that insult or I'll horsewhip you."

Ginter was too angry to heed the other. In his rage he had become indiscreet. "Campbell is guilty!" he snapped. "I have proof that Laurence Stevens is not a reliable witness. He has been mixed up in several shady deals that I know of. In his dealings—"

To protect Stevens from having his good name blackened by the very man who had tarnished it, Campbell condescended to argue his case.

"Does it strike the court as reasonable," he cut in crisply, "that I would pistol a man and then leave a fraudulently loaded weapon in the hand of my victim to betray me? The gun belonging to me, would I have broken a brace of valuable duelling pistols, at the same time leaving a trail that would lead straight to my door? The handwriting on that calling card is not mine. Besides all of which, the testimony proves that I couldn't possibly have got to MacNelly's Island before nine thirty Tuesday morning. According to the coroner, the deceased had already been dead not less than two and a half hours. Admitting that the coroner may have made an error of two or three hours in his estimate, do you think that George Claybourne, going to meet me at dawn, would have waited patiently for several hours—until nine thirty—for me to put in an appearance?"

"Sheriff," grunted Matt Woodruff briefly, "let me tear up thet warrant against Campbell. Dagn it, Fungall! This case is over as far as Campbell is concerned."

Fungall nodded and rapped on the desk.

"Prisoner discharged," he croaked. "I find the deceased foully murdered by persons unknown. Inquest held open for the gathering of more evidence," he added thoughtfully. "Case adjourned and prisoner dismissed."

A heavy load remained on Irene's heart, but a heavier had, for some reason, fallen away. Unaccountably she was glad, glad that Campbell had proved his innocence. As the court room cleared and as she and her companions arose to file out of the jury box she observed Campbell approaching. He bowed low before her and addressed her gravely.

"Miss Claybourne," he murmured earnestly. "I cannot tell you how deeply I feel for you and how much I regret your loss. Because I have been the cause of the least bit of harm to you I am humbled to the dust."

SHE opened her lips to speak, a faint blush mantling her neck. She was on the verge of offering an apology for having caused him such awful inconvenience—then a thought struck her which nearly stilled her brave little heart. Her father had left home under the impression that he was going to duel with Allan Campbell. He had died in a pseudo-duel, gun in hand. He would not have gone through with the arrangement unless he had been facing the man to whom he felt that he owed a meeting.

Since there was no man within hun-

dreds of miles who remotely resembled Allan Campbell, her father must have been facing the Hawk when he met his death!

She turned as white as a sheet and swayed like a delicate bud in the wind.

"You!" she gasped out. "You even dare to offer me consolation when your hands are still red with wet blood? You—you loathsome beast!"

Campbell fairly staggered under the withering scorn of her response. He caught at the railing to steady himself. Woodruff and Metclaff stared at both of them in surprise. He was astounded, but his astonishment was only another bit of acting, in her eyes.

Then his reserve and inscrutable calm, once badly shaken this morning, shattered into a thousand pieces. His mantle of self-control was torn from him, leaving the naked human soul quivering before her. She had once idly wished to arouse him; she had never dreamed of this moment. Fury, agony, love, and pride twisted his calm, handsome features out of their perfect shape.

With a movement as swift as the dart of a swallow he reached forth both his hands and seized her just above the elbows. As easily as though she were a bit of thistledown he lifted her over the railing and held her there.

"My lady," he grated, and his tones were unrecognizable. "You shall apologize to me for that—on your knees, so help me God!"

Quivering in sheer fright, Irene was speechless. Metclaff, a growl of rage in his throat, vaulted the railing once more, this time to take the offensive against the Mississippi Hawk.

"Release her, you dog!" he gritted. "Release her, or I'll split you in half."

Campbell stared at the enraged officer, the light of sanity slowly coming back to his eyes. He released the girl, gently pushing her to one side. With his eyes still on the face of the furious lieutenant he slowly reached his right hand to his breast pocket. With a dexterous flip of the wrist he plucked his linen handkerchief forth and snapped it against Metclaff's cheek with such precision and accuracy that he brought the blood. With a startled oath the officer staggered back a pace, clapping his hand to his stinging cheek, while the Hawk carefully replaced his handkerchief.

"Sir," the latter said distinctly, "I believe the insults are now even. I have waited overlong to resent your boorish manners. I beg to state that I am now at your service—any time, any place, any weapons."

These words, almost identical to those George Claybourne had used to Allan Campbell, caused Irene to swoon against the railing. Matt Woodruff caught her quickly against his chest.

"Damned if I know what all this is about," he snapped. "But there's too danged much fireworks goin' on. Metclaff, c'mere an' take Irene home."

The lieutenant gave the calmly waiting Campbell one long stare and then obeyed the older man. The Hawk met Woodruff's eyes just as he turned to join Stevens and Tangle-eye, and thought he detected a faint gleam of approbation or sympathy in their greenish-gray depths.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR A LADY'S APOLOGY.

CAMPBELL and Stevens parted on the street in front of the court house, Stevens to settle with Ginter, and Campbell to adjust himself to a new purpose.

"You'll come to the Dixie House as soon as you are through?" he asked Stevens. "I must talk with you at once."

The gin owner nodded cordially and left him. Groups of men stood on the street discussing the amazing affair. They eyed the Hawk intently, but none made an offer to molest him. Tangle-eye followed patiently behind.

As Campbell strode along, wrapped in thought, he puzzled over Irene Claybourne's amazing action just before she had left the court house. There must have been a sufficient reason; she was not a person to do things blindly. Applied to this puzzle his keen mind was not long in seeing the solution. George Claybourne would not have fallen in a duel unless he knew that he was facing the man he had come to face.

"Great God!" breathed Campbell, aghast. "No wonder she said that. She has a right to believe as she believes. If that mob had thought of this I would never have got out alive with fifty Woodruffs, Metclaffs, and Stevens to succor me. The whole plot is far deeper than I had supposed. *Claybourne was murdered before he set foot on the island.*"

Entering the Dixie House, Campbell lingered in his rooms only long enough to remove his hat and coat and buckle on a pair of heavy six-shooters in accepted Western style. The brace of graceful pocket derringers he usually wore beneath his coat he neglected now; he wanted guns that were accurate and which could be fired more than once.

"How 'bout youah duellin' pistols, Marse Allan?" inquired Tangle-eye, ignorant of his master's intentions, but reminded of one set of guns by the other. "We done left dem at de cou't-house."

"They must remain there as evidence, Tangle, until the death of Mr. Claybourne has been explained."

"Who yo' reckon shot po' missy's pappy, suh?"

"If I knew that, he would be a dead man within the hour. One thing I can tell you, Tangle. Mr. Claybourne was not killed with either one of my pistols."

"Lawsy, Marse Allan," gasped the astonished negro. "Den how did youah pistol git out f'om de case into Marse Claybourne's hand?"

"That is what we are going to find out right now," replied his master in a hard voice. "Come."

They descended the stairs in silence. At the front entrance of the barroom, Campbell whirled about, placing his back to the wall at one side of the oaken barrier.

"Men," he said in a voice which held the ring of tempered steel, "I have private and important business to take up at once with the employees of this house. Before I start I ask you as gentlemen to whom another's business is no concern to leave the building."

The patrons glanced at each other uncertainly. This was the queerest request they had ever heard.

"Come," said the Hawk tersely. "I cannot delay. Of course, I cannot force you to leave a public house, but if you stay I shall be compelled to subject you to the same treatment I am going to give the employees."

"Hey!" the hard-eyed bartender found his voice. "What th' hell! Tom! Jason! Come here—"

"If you utter another sound it will be your last," warned Campbell in a hard voice.

The bartender, while perhaps in a poor cause, was a courageous man. In the twinkling of an eye he changed his

vocal intention to a physical act. Clamping shut his lips, he darted his hand under the mahogany counter and brought it forth with a gun. The weapon had hardly appeared above the line of the bar when there was a sharp report from the door, and the bartender dropped the pistol and staggered against the back bar with a shattered wrist.

"Outside, gentlemen," admonished the Hawk grimly, lowering his weapon and standing at ease.

There was no further argument. The dozen patrons of the place hurried out. Campbell slammed the heavy door shut and barred it.

"NOW then," he crisped out. "Come out from behind that bar, you."

Groaning in agony, the bartender complied, all the fight gone out of him. At the same time an aproned waiter came running in from the kitchen. He stopped short at sight of the tableau.

"Stand where you are," commanded Campbell. "Bartender, how many servants in this house? Quickly!"

"Eight or ten," stated the wounded man through set lips which were whitening with the growing pain.

"What's this man's name?"

"That's Jason," replied the bartender, glancing at his tardy assistant.

"Very well. Jason, go and send every other employee directly to this room at once. My man will go with you; if you fail, Tangle-eye will break your neck; and I will pistol your superior here if you aren't back within ten minutes. Go!"

Knowing that any attempt at investigation on his part would reach Ginter's ears immediately, Campbell had resolved on a wholesale and thorough inquisition at once.

Silently, one by one, five men and two women entered the long room from the kitchen and the apartments above. Three of the men were negro hostlers from the stable. The Hawk motioned them to line up along one side of the room as they entered, forbidding any speech between them. The last man to enter ahead of Jason and Tangle-eye was a heavy-jowled individual whose eyes were red from sleep. He had been aroused upstairs. This was Ferguson, the night man.

Relenting a trifle at sight of the wounded bartender's agony, Campbell nodded toward the suffering man.

"Tie up his wrist, Tangle," he directed.

The negro complied with a bit of crude but effective surgery. He applied an improvised tourniquet of cloth and then wrapped the wrist tightly with bandaging.

"Now then," said Campbell in a slow, impressive voice, "you are all here to answer a few questions. If I get the truth out of you at once the process will be short and painless. Somebody entered my rooms Monday night with a pass key and stole one of my duelling pistols and a visiting card. It was done at the bidding of another. Thus, I will not harm the person who admits the act. Which one of you did it?"

He shot the last six words at them in such cold ferocity that the two chambermaids jumped. No one answered his question.

"All right, Tangle. Get my bull whip."

The huge slave turned and ran quickly up the stairs.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Ferguson thickly.

"I shall take the hide off of every man's back unless somebody talks," an-

swered Campbell in a dead level voice. "You fools! You don't realize to what extent I'll go, to learn what I want to know."

He was watching the white men as he spoke, and he saw Ferguson's eyes flicker. The three negroes fell to their knees and set up a wailing protestation of their innocence. But Campbell was oblivious, impervious to all this; he had picked out the man who knew what he wanted to know.

WHEN Tangle-eye returned with a vicious-looking black whip coiled over one shoulder, the Hawk motioned for him to come forward.

"Place a chair and a table directly in front of me, Tangle," he commanded.

The negro picked up one of the heavy oaken tables and set it down lightly ten feet before his master. He placed a chair beside it.

"Another chair, Tangle. On the other side of the table. No—turn it around. There. Now, Ferguson! Come forward. Straddle that second chair and place your hands on the table."

The night man did not move. Campbell eased himself into the seat on his side of the table. Drawing his second gun so that he could command the entire situation, he spoke once more.

"I'll give you one more chance to move of your own accord, Ferguson," he said crisply. "Are you coming to the table?"

"Hell, no!" roared Ferguson angrily, a note of fear in his voice. "I'm going back upstairs." He started toward the stairs, trying to make his bluff good.

"Halt!" ripped out the voice of the Hawk.

Ferguson ignored the command. Campbell carelessly pointed one of his guns and pulled the trigger. The slug tore into the heel of Ferguson's left boot just as he raised that foot from the floor. The impact tripped him and he sprawled to the floor where he prudently lay without moving.

"Search the rest of them for guns," Campbell directed his slave. "Never mind the two chambermaids. If you women know anything about this matter, speak now and save the skins of these men."

The women shook their heads in a frightened manner.

"Please, sir," one of them curtsied timidly, "we don't know nothing about your pistol, sir. I tidy your rooms every morning, sir, but I didn't touch a thing."

"You have a pass key to my rooms?" asked Campbell.

"No, sir. I get the key down here from Mr. Wetherby, sir."

"Very well. Both of you may go upstairs. Do not leave the house, and do not try to attract attention from any of the windows."

Hurriedly the two domestics went up the steps. Tangle-eye brought three guns, a razor, and two pocket knives which he placed on the table before his master. Ferguson he had searched while the man lay prone on the floor. The fellow had been unarmed, being clad in naught but trousers and boots over his nightclothes.

"Fetch him here!" the Hawk nodded at the man on the floor.

Tangle-eye stepped to Ferguson's side and, oblivious of the man's violent struggles, gathered him up and brought him forward. He plopped him down astride the reversed chair and stepped back, leaving the two white men facing each other across the table.

"Who got the pass key from you and entered my rooms Monday night?" demanded Campbell keenly.

Ferguson glared at him without speaking.

Campbell waved a gun at the tensely watching group.

"Turn your faces to the wall," he commanded tersely. "All of you. I'll shoot down the first man who turns his head."

Like a well-drilled squad the six men lined up with their faces to the wall. Campbell nodded his head at Tangle-eye. With immobile face the massive black lifted his right arm, his whip uncoiling as he did so. He struck once. The black thong whistled through the air and lashed across Ferguson's thinly clad back.

The rage of the man was awful to behold. He squirmed horribly. Frothing at the mouth, he cursed the Hawk and the negro with a vileness that was shocking even to hardened ears. Tangle-eye grasped him and forced him back into his seat.

"Damn you!" Ferguson shrieked. "You black fiend, I'll kill you for this. I'll—"

"Answer my question!" barked Campbell. "Who entered my rooms? You know, and I know you know."

Quivering with pain, Ferguson gripped the edge of the table.

"I'll see you in hell first," snarled Ferguson.

REGRETFULLY Campbell lifted his eyes to his negro and then refastened them on the night man's face. Once more the whip fell, this time with greater force, cutting the nightshirt in two. Ferguson screamed in agony. He writhed about like an animal that was fighting the attack of strychnine poisoning. The Hawk waited with brooding, somber eyes in which a relentless blue flame glowed.

"You are a great fool, Ferguson," the Hawk said. "Your loyalty to Fred Ginter is costing you dear. Do you think I relish the task of whipping a white man? But if you don't answer my question I promise you that you will die here under the lash like a galley slave of the ancients. *Who stole that pistol?*"

These words broke down the man's resistance. He fell forward limply across the table, gasping in pain. The blood was staining his garment from that last cut.

"It—it was Purse Venier," he whispered. "He had an order from Ginter, damn you. I gave him the key and watched out for you while he was up there. I don't know what he got—I wasn't told. Is that all you want to know?"

"Practically. At what o'clock was this?"

"About nine, I think."

"And who is Purse Venier?"

"You don't know? He's that new man from Oklahoma—the fellow that started all that talk about being a more dangerous man than you."

"Doubtless he is right. That will be all. Listen to me, Ferguson and Wetherby! The first move on your part to take vengeance against me by attacking my slave means that I will shoot to kill upon sight. Now, get out!"

They got. As Tangle-eye opened the front door and swung it back a man stepped across the threshold. It was Laurence Stevens. He stared at the scene before him in amazement.

"I meant to have this mess over with before you got here," apologized Campbell.

"Don't you know that Ginter will

be told of what you have done within the next half hour?" Stevens protested.

"I think," admitted the Hawk gravely, "that I have gone stark crazy. I want from you a list of the men who work for Fred Ginter on killings. I am investigating the murder of George Claybourne."

"But why?" gasped the gin owner in wonder. "You are not responsible; your name has been cleared. Why must you do the work of the law?"

The Hawk began striding up and down the room. He laughed bitterly, sardonically.

"Why? I have no reason. There is nothing in it for me save a possible apology from a lady to whom I am less than nothing."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE LIGHTNING'S FLASH.

TO make a fitting end for that tempestuous Wednesday, as if in accord with the turbulent passions of men, the elements loosed their fury upon the countryside. By mid-afternoon a brassy glare filled the sky with a threatening light and the heavy air clung lifelessly to the ground, almost smothering in its sultry embrace. It was tornado weather.

The voices of birds were hushed. Then, with a vicious clap of thunder, without the sign of a breeze, the rain came down in torrents—as if in a belated lamentation at the passing of such a man as George Claybourne. With the coming of dark there was no cessation of the storm. Forked lightning played viciously over the landscape, revealing objects with startling distinctness for a brief instant and then plunging everything back into a greater blackness. As the cloudburst had swept down from the mountains to westward, deluging the watershed to the river all the way, the Arkansas began to rise, a hissing, muddy flood.

Indifferent to the violence of the storm, Purse Venier paid out the lines at the bow and stern of his houseboat and calmly made ready to ride out the tornado. The little wanigan bobbed up and down like a cork. With doors and windows closed tightly against the driving rain, it was no wonder that he failed to hear the hails of the man on the shore under the willows. Again and again the man in oilskins called with no result.

But if Venier failed to hear the sound of that voice, it did not follow that all others were unaware of the shouts. From the heart of a clump of tangled willows a scant ten feet from the angrily shouting individual a woolly black head peered forth and saw the man's figure in every lightning flash. Clad from head to foot in black so that he was well-nigh invisible, impervious to the wind and rain, Tangle-eye had lain here in watch over the shantyboat since the coming of darkness. While his master pursued his investigations elsewhere, the huge negro had remained on the trail of the bad man from Oklahoma with the efficacy of an unshakable Nemesis.

Purse was unaware that he was a marked man. He had no knowledge of Ferguson's incriminating admission regarding his movements Monday night. Likewise, he was unaware of the extent of Fred Ginter's animosity toward him for his wagging tongue under the influence of liquor.

At an unusually wild plunge of his craft, he feared that one of the mooring ropes might have parted or slipped, and so opened the door on the lee side.

The man in oilskins saw him. He

cupped his hands about his mouth and surpassed himself with a mighty bellow:

"Venier! Venier! Answer me, you fool!"

Purse must have heard, for his voice roared back across the narrow gulf of hissing water. "Hey? 'Zat you, Mr. Ginter?"

"Me," agreed the oilskinned form inelegantly. "Pull your boat against the bank. I want to come aboard."

Grumbling, Venier grasped one of the mooring cables and slowly snubbed the blunt nose of the little craft to the bank, fighting the current every inch of the way.

AT precisely the right moment Ginter poised himself and leaped across the intervening space. At once Venier carefully eased out the line. Neither of them saw the huge form that wormed its way down to the water's edge and grasped the rope where it was tied to the bole of a tree.

With the ease of an eel Tangle-eye slipped into the water and pulled himself hand over hand along the rope to the side of the boat. More than once the angry water rose over his head as the rope slackened against the wind, but he fought his way along without faltering, as calmly as though the treacherous current were not snatching at his body with murderous intent.

"Waal," growled Venier as he led the way into the cabin, "what d'you want this time o' night in this kind o' weather?"

"Don't give me any of your lip," snapped Ginter curtly as he removed his dripping oilskins. "I've got plenty to tell you. That damned Campbell horse-whipped the information out of Ferguson that you are the man who stole his pistol and that card from his rooms. That was this afternoon. No knowing what he has done since."

Venier started to his feet.

"The hell he did!" he ejaculated. Then he sat back down with a vicious grin. "Waal, what of it? What's he gonna do 'bout it?"

"Don't you see, you fool, that you are now a marked man?"

Venier sneered openly. "I believe you're afraid o' him."

This remark stung the saloon owner. His lips curled back in a snarl. "He will be dead before to-morrow night. But he might get to you before they get him. You'd better take the trail after him, too. You're the only man he knows he's after, and he'll be on your ugly neck right away now."

"What if he is?" replied Venier insolently. "If he gits the best of me, I'll git out of it by tellin' him who he's after. I didn't kill Claybourne."

"Ahhhh!" breathed Ginter, a hard glint coming into his eyes. "That's the way I had you figured out, you yellow coward. It makes no difference which one of my men did the shooting. You're the only witness who knows and who can tell—and you aren't going to be here to do it."

As he spoke he made a swift motion with his hand and jerked out a derringer from his left sleeve, leveling the gun upon Venier across the table corner. Before he could pull the trigger, Venier glanced beyond him and gave a short laugh.

"Wait! Look behind you and think a bit afore you kill me," he sneered. "I picked up enough Injun tricks in Oklahoma to be ready for this. You'll go with me."

Ginter twisted his head for a hurried glance, betrayed into looking by the apparently frank admission on the part of Venier that he could not es-

cape death. Instantly Venier's left hand shot forward and grasped the barrel of the weapon while his right hand sought his employer's throat. Ginter recovered himself like a cat and pulled the trigger. But the muzzle of his pistol had been deflected and the bullet whizzed harmlessly past Venier's shaggy head.

THEY clawed their way erect, and then fell to the dirty floor of the little cabin in a convulsive grapple. The wind howled on, the rain hissed against the surface of the ugly water, the craft still bobbed erratically about, but all this was forgotten by the two men writhing there. Neither saw the glistening black face with the badly crossed eye, that pressed against the dingy window pane. All else was unheeded as they fought to kill.

The two men, threshing about on the floor, rolled against the leg of the table. The frail support collapsed and the lamp slid to the floor in a tinkle of breaking glass.

At last Tangle-eye heard a man stagger out on deck and stumble cursingly toward him, and he drew back along the narrow walkway a few more inches. The man, invisible in the dark, was dragging something after him. Tangle-eye waited breathlessly. After what seemed an interminable time there was a brilliant flash of lightning. In that brief, vivid flare the negro saw Fred Ginter in the act of tossing the limp body of Purse Venier out into the raging current.

Above the roar of the storm and the mad swirling of the river the negro's keen ear heard the faint sound of that fatal splash. He did not hesitate to ponder his course of action now. Without the least delay Tangle-eye dived headfirst into the inky flood after the man he was ordered to watch. Ginter was left alone in possession of the wanigan.

The current snatched at the vast body of the negro and bore it along like a millrace. Fearful lest he swim past the body of Venier, he breasted the current and fought against it as he waited for the next lightning flash. Finally it came, and he thrust himself far out of the water and glared wildly about. The houseboat was fully fifty yards upstream and receding every instant. The surface of the roily water was thick with débris and matter washed down from the land.

"Ain' no use," he murmured sorrowfully to himself. "Dat Beniah done gone to de bottom. Marse Allan sho' will be vexed."

His meditations broke off abruptly as the fingers of one hand came into contact with the unmistakable feel of cloth. He lunged forward with great strokes and felt wildly about for that object he had touched. He found it and drew it to him.

His questing hand identified it as a human body. Treading water with mighty feet as he felt of his find, he was borne along down-stream, successful only in keeping his head and the head of the other above the reach of slapping waves. Then his fingers encountered the hilt of a bowie knife sticking almost perpendicularly out of the chest just to the right of the sternum. Tangle-eye needed not the next flash of lightning to tell him that he had found his man.

HE turned the body onto its back and shifted his grip to the shaggy hair. Then began a terrific struggle to tow the body to the bank in a long diagonal against the seething black waters.

The raging river swept him past the wharves at the foot of the main street at such a speed as to preclude all hope of winning to one of the jutting piers. Realizing that he could not be heard above the pandemonium of the storm, he did not waste his breath by shouting for aid.

The black man was in the grip of a relentless current. Half a mile below the town the strength of even such a giant as Tangle-eye began to fail. He despaired of salvaging the limp body he held against his chest, but he refused to surrender to the sneering, hissing river. Then he felt a change in the current, and knew that he had reached the mighty bend in the river. Remembering that the channel split here on the point of MacNelly's Island, he redoubled his efforts to make land before the Arkansas swept far out around the bend.

Luck favored him, giving his valiant strength a slight advantage for the first time. He was in the exact center of the current where it divided against the head of the island. With the last of his ebbing strength he fought to win the point where the rising water rolled higher and higher against the land almost like surf along a wind-beaten coast.

His feet touched bottom and he staggered up the shelving slope until he and his burden were out of reach of the baffled river. He laid Venier on the sand.

The cessation of motion aroused the man he had supposed dead. Venier coughed as if his lungs were full of water. They were filling up rapidly enough, but not with water; it was blood.

"Damn you, Ginter," gurgled Venier in a horrible throaty murmur. "Knifed with my own pig-sticker! An' by a cheap imitation of a damn *gentleman*. I'll git you in hell fer this!"

"Man, Ah sho' thought yo' was daid," Tangle-eye spoke. "Marse Allen Campbell sent me after yo'."

Venier's hands felt the sand beneath his body, and Tangle-eye awaited further speech. The negro felt that the situation was far beyond his simple powers. If only his master were here. Then the dying man spoke, his voice grimly bitter despite its weakness.

"Nigger," he murmured, "whar's your owner? I hate gentlemen, but I'll bury the hatchet 'ith your master if he'll git thet damn Ginter. Git Campbell, I tell you, you black devil! I got somethin' to tell 'im."

"Lawd! Lawd!" lamented Tangle-eye in despair. "If only Marse Allan was heah now!"

At this moment, as if in answer to the gigantic negro's prayer, the heavens were rent asunder by a jagged streak of lightning which left the smell of sulphur behind it. A great oak tree in the heart of the island split wide as it received this supreme shaft from the sky. And in the blinding light which enveloped him the startled Tangle-eye saw the figure of Allan Campbell wrapped in a rubber poncho and standing under the meager shelter of a cottonwood tree not ten paces distant.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON MACNELLY'S ISLAND.

AFTER playing his bold stroke in the Dixie House, realizing that his act was an open declaration of war, Allan Campbell laid his plans accordingly. His only advantage lay in the swiftness of his moves; and the

Hawk now did a surprising thing. He took leave of Stevens, sent Tangle-eye hotfoot on the trail of Purse Venier; then, still armed with his brace of six-shooters, he turned his steps toward Woodruff's general store.

Customers and clerks fell silent at his entrance. Ignoring their amazed glances, he addressed himself to the nearest clerk.

"Is Mr. Woodruff in the building? Tell him, please, that Allan Campbell is calling."

The Hawk found Matt Woodruff behind the partition in his shirt sleeves, his dingy vest sagging under his arms in its customary spiritless fashion. He had been standing over a small iron pot in which a mixture of lead and tin was slowly reaching a fusing point. On the table beside Woodruff a horse blanket covered some flat object.

The two men eyed each other gravely. Campbell was the first to speak.

"Sir," he said, "you are doubtless surprised to see me here. You have no reason to be my friend; but I am convinced that a fairer man than you is not to be found west of the Mississippi. For that reason, and for that reason alone, I have come to talk to you."

"Sit down," said Matt abruptly, pointing to a chair. He himself swung one leg over the corner of the table. "What's on your mind?"

"From what you did at the inquest this morning, Mr. Woodruff, I inferred that you were convinced of my innocence of the murder of your brother-in-law. Was I mistaken?"

"Nope," said Matt laconically.

"Thank you," went on Campbell. "But there is a very striking point that was not brought out at the inquest. The pistol of mine which was found in Claybourne's grasp was never fired by him. If it had been, there could be no question that he was killed by me—because he would not have faced any other man in a duel, that morning."

"Thet's right," nodded Matt, eying the younger man keenly. "I thought of thet at the inquest this mornin'," agreed Matt calmly.

"You did?" almost gasped the Hawk. "And yet you fought for me?"

"Sure. I was watchin' you all the time; I seen thet the entire testimony was a brand-new story to you, although you done your best to look indifferent. An' when you faced the mob an' waited for 'em to take you out an' string you up, I knowed you was innocent. No guilty man could of looked jes' like you looked at thet minute. I didn't need to hear the testimony o' Stevens to clear you in my mind."

THE Hawk studied the shrewd old man in admiration mingled with respect. "Then you understand that Claybourne must have been killed before he knew what was taking place, and that all that evidence against me was placed there afterward?"

"Exactly," agreed Woodruff unsmilingly.

"I am honor bound to track down and slay his murderers, as I was used for the decoy to entice him to his death. I am on the trail of the slayers, one of whom is that shanty-boat man called Venier. I've come to tell you, so that, in the event anything happens to me, you can go on with the search, using all that I have learned."

"Tell me all about it, son," suggested Woodruff kindly.

Their eyes met again, and flared up in the warm flame of friendship. When the Hawk had finished his brief narrative, Uncle Matt glanced at him thoughtfully.

"Waal," he said, "I reckon you understand thet I'm not gonna sit idle all this time. Have you any suggestions to make?"

"Yes," said Campbell crisply. "For one thing, before Mr. Claybourne is buried I want that bullet extracted from his brain. I want to prove my duelling pistol did not kill him."

In answer to this Woodruff abruptly stood up and peeled back the horse blanket, disclosing Campbell's duelling case. Woodruff picked up a small leaden ball and held it up for his inspection.

"The bullet in question," said Matt sententiously. "Had the coroner git it for me right after the inquest. I wanted to find out the same thing myself." The old man, taking up Campbell's plier-shaped bullet mold, proceeded to mold two or three of the leaden balls and then one of the conical-shaped pellets. In silence they compared the result.

While the freshly molded bullets chambered perfectly in both of the duelling pistols, they were utterly unlike the flattened bullet taken from the head of the murdered man. Neither would this latter ball fit the barrels of the pistols, being entirely too large even before having been flattened. The two men looked at each other.

"All this experiment does is to clear my duelling pistols of the charge," said Campbell soberly. "I am going to MacNelly's Island right now, to see what I can find. I'll see you when I come back, sir."

"No use," discouraged Matt soberly. "Metclaff an' I looked all over the dang spot an' couldn't find nothin'."

"Doubtless you are right," said Campbell respectfully. "But you must have been somewhat excited; it's possible that you may have overlooked something."

"Possible," agreed Uncle Matt. "You can git a rowboat down at the landin'."

"I don't want anybody in Belle Point to suspect where I'm going."

"Thet's right," agreed Matt quickly, seeing the point. "I reckon you'd better go by road to Stan Peters's place. He lives near the river right by the island. You can git a boat from him to cross the channel, like we done when we was huntin' George. I'll give you a note to Stan."

IT was with mingled feelings that Campbell landed, on the bit of land where Claybourne was supposed to have met his death. Carefully tying up his boat, he made his way through the tangled thickets.

The spot where Claybourne had been found was near the center of the island. It was a fairly smooth clearing, surrounded by a growth of scrub oaks, poplar trees, and brambles.

At one end of the clearing rose the leaning finger of a stone chimney, mute memorial to the forgotten MacNelly. The house itself had burned down a number of years previous.

Campbell was slowly covering the clearing in the dim light when the storm broke upon him in all its fury. He wrapped his poncho about him and ran for the rock chimney. Crouched inside the wide fireplace he watched the deluge destroy all chances of learning anything from the ground.

Long after dark he was still held prisoner with no company but his thoughts and the occasional wicked forks of lightning. At length, toward midnight, he decided to move regardless of the unabated downpour. By the aid of the lightning, he made his way through the underbrush toward the head of the island.

Under the shelter of a young cottonwood he halted, and stared upstream as he waited for the lightning to reveal the height of the rising flood, wondering if it were advisable for him to find his boat and attempt to make the mainland. It was at this moment that the jagged bolt of lightning struck the big oak near MacNelly's clearing and revealed to his astonished eyes the figures of his slave and Venier on the sand between him and the water. To both the Hawk and his slave it seemed as unreal, as fantastic as a meeting of specters.

Instantly he was at the side of his kneeling servant.

"Lawd, Lawd!" cried out Tangle-eye in ecstasy. "Am dat yo', Marse Allan?"

Venier roused himself at the sound of voices.

"Injuns comin'," he babbled. "It's the stake fer both o' us now—"

Campbell's fingers bit deeply into the raving man's shoulder.

"Venier!" he snapped in the supine man's ear. "Venier! This is the Mississippi Hawk. Do you hear me? I am the man you have asked to see."

The sobriquet "Hawk" had the desired effect. Venier came to his senses quickly. In his weakened, delirious condition it did not strike him as queer for Campbell to appear on this deserted island. He accepted the fact simply, as a matter of course, as a matter in utter accord with the other wild deeds of this wild night.

"The Hawk? Allan Campbell?" he murmured. "You're jes' in time, mister. Ginter's done fer me, to shut my mouth; but I'll cheat him! Come closer! I'll tell you all about the killin' of Claybourne. Listen, fer I ain't got time to waste."

For answer Campbell jerked his poncho from about himself and thrust it into the hands of his slave.

"Hold it over our heads, Tangle," he directed tersely.

Then he raised the dying man gently to a sitting position so that the blood would not gurgle so badly in his throat and propped him against his knee. There, in the arms of a man of the class he hated, on a lonely storm-swept spit of land, Purse Venier made his deathbed confession. It was a hard, ugly way to die, but Venier was dying as he had lived. And as he sank into eternal night, as his voice grew weaker and weaker with each passing breath, the fury of the tempest died away as though the elements had likewise unburdened themselves of a load of sin.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

"What happened, Til?" demanded the sheriff

The Mark of Guilt

'Lige and 'Bige, they look alike—and the pair of them distill 100-proof grief for Sheriff Rutherford, up in the moonshine country

By H. M. SUTHERLAND

BART PATTON, elusive moonshine still "spotter" of Sheriff Rutherford's grapevine system, shuffled noiselessly into the latter's office in the county courthouse and nodded to the three men who were lounging in various attitudes of shirt-sleeved ease, vainly seeking relief from the sultry heat of the mid afternoon.

"Howdy, men!" drawled the newcomer, dropping into a chair and fanning his face with his shapeless old hat, his narrowed, slaty eyes focused on the purpling Cumberlands in the near distance.

The sheriff and his two deputies, Lance Buckmaster and Cal Higgins, merely grunted, making little effort to throw off the lethargy that gripped them. Deep in their hearts they had little respect for a spotter who would betray his friends and acquaintances, even though that betrayal did redound to the credit of the sheriff's office.

Dropping his feet heavily from the leaf of his desk, Sheriff Rutherford straightened his bulky figure and reached for a cigar.

"Well?" he questioned sharply. "Onburden yoreself."

The hint of an apologetic grin, which had been playing about Patton's mouth, faded instantly, and his face hardened with resentment, but when

he spoke his voice was soft and hesitant.

"I jest dropped in to tell ye that I located a moonshinin' outfit a leetle while ago as I come to town. She's a sixty-gallon b'iler, an' her keg's a thumpin'."

"Whar at?" demanded Rutherford curtly.

"T'other side of the mouth of Christmas Creek. Do ye recollect that leetle branch that comes out jest above the old camp meetin' ground?"

Rutherford nodded in affirmation.

"I stopped thar," continued Patton, "to git me a drink of water, goin' back up that dreen a few steps, an' when I laid down to drink, I smelled the still-slop plain. Tasted it, too. The fools had been dumpin' it so's it dreened into the creek. 'Twa'n't more'n half a mile to the still site, an' they're makin' a run of sugar-top right now."

"Who was at the still?" This from Deputy Buckmaster, a youthful hillman with sharp features and a penetrating gaze.

"Them Cantrell twins."

For a period of perhaps thirty seconds an absolute silence obtained, and during that interim the two deputies exchanged a covert glance. They, as well as practically every one else in the entire county, knew that the Cantrell twins were the fly in Rutherford's ointment, and that the mere mention of them was likely to penetrate beneath the sheriff's usually placid exterior and bring on a wrathful explosion.

The seemingly endless chain of law violations, petty crimes for the most part, committed by these twins, and the immunity they enjoyed through a strange freak of nature, had long since been given first place on the sheriff's calendar. In fact, Rutherford was openly neglecting his other duties in the effort to capture the twins, but his every snare had proved futile. The game of hide and seek the trio had been playing was the stock joke of the hills, and was threatening Rutherford's chances in the coming November election.

UNDER the sheriff's steady gaze Patton wriggled slightly and dropped his eyes to the floor. With an angry growl Rutherford came to his feet, towering over his informant and tugging fiercely at his drooping mustaches—a characteristic gesture when he was worried.

"Both of them at that still?" he demanded in staccato.

"Jest one."

"Which'n?"

Patton shrugged and shook his head.

"The Lord only knows," he replied softly. "Their own mammy can't tell one from t'other."

That statement, as the sheriff well knew, was literally true. Christened Elijah and Abijah, but known throughout the hill country as 'Lige and 'Bige, they were an enigma which baffled even their closest friends. Their features were identical—dark hair, metallic blue eyes, swart, and taciturn—and their habits and characteristics were amazingly similar. They even made it a point to dress alike, down to the slightest detail.

Their father, old Gideon Cantrell, was a respected citizen, possessed of a deeply religious instinct, evidenced by the fact that all of his children had received Biblical names; but the twins, at the age of twenty-three, were considered the most expert moonshiners in the Cumberlands, and they had rightfully earned a reputation for extraordinary sagacity in outwitting sheriff's posses and revenue officers.

Because of their bewildering similarity they had managed to elude justice so often that they had grown bold to the point of bravado. Eight times during the last three years 'Lige or 'Bige, one or the other—it had never been ascertained definitely which—had been indicted and brought before the court. In each trial the prosecution had failed utterly to establish the identity of the prisoner "beyond the shadow of a doubt" as the law demanded, and the charges had been dismissed.

Little interest had been aroused the first time this had occurred, but when it grew to be a regular feature of each term of court the sheriff came in for no little gibing and sarcastic criticism, particularly on the part of Wirt Hammond's friends, who saw in it a weapon with which to elect their candidate for sheriff in the coming election. For a time Rutherford had ignored these thrusts, but when it was whispered that he was growing senile and unable to perform the duties of his office, he had exploded with such vehemence that few dared broach the subject.

Patton evidently feared the wrath of the high sheriff, for he arose with alacrity and slouched toward the door.

"Reckon ye won't be needin' me, will ye?" he asked over his shoulder.

"No, we'll handle it."

Patton vanished silently, and Rutherford strode toward his guns, which were hanging from a nail on the opposite wall. Without a word Deputies Buckmaster and Higgins put on their coats and disappeared.

A SHORT distance beyond the mouth of Christmas Creek, deep back in the Cumberlands, they halted and led their horses into a bed of rhododendron where they would be completely hidden from a chance passer-by. Then climbing swiftly up the slope they skirted the dense undergrowth and headed up the little creek in the direction of the ravine in which Patton had spotted the still.

In single file they threaded the thickets with the stealth of long practice, and as they drew near to their quarry they redoubled their caution, making a special effort to avoid stepping on any dried twigs, the crackling of which would announce their approach to the keen ears of the Cantrells.

Rutherford was three or four paces in front of his deputies, and as he reached the mouth of what appeared to be the ravine they sought, he halted suddenly, sniffing the air with distended nostrils. Softly Higgins and Buckmaster drew alongside, and the trio gave their undivided attention to the leafy screens between them and the ravine. A faint breeze brought the unmistakable odor of souring mash, and the hand of each officer dropped instinctively to his gun.

"He's up the left fork," whispered Rutherford, pointing toward a defile across the hollow. "See the smoke? He's burnin' seasoned white oak."

A film hung over the banks of spicewood about the ravine and the tang of wood smoke was distinct. Buckmaster leaned close to his chief.

"What's our play?"

"I was tryin' to figger that out," replied Rutherford thoughtfully, tugging at his mustaches. "Looks like we'd best surround him on three sides an' leave the steep slope back of him open. He can't run fast up that way. You take the left an'—hold!"

With a single movement the three officers crouched behind the underbrush as a slouching figure in overalls appeared suddenly through a fringe of

bushes at the edge of the ravine carrying a water pail. He advanced directly toward the hidden trio until he reached the bed of the creek where he halted and filled his bucket. For a brief instant Rutherford debated the chances of a quick rush, but realizing that their presence was not suspected, he decided to remain under cover and then slip in on his man unawares. An instant later the twin turned and vanished in the spicewood.

"We'll get him, whichever one 'tis," growled Rutherford with satisfaction, "but I'd give a hundred dollars if both of 'em were thar."

For several minutes he studied the lay of the land before them and gave his deputies minute instructions as to their method and direction of approach, reserving for himself the ravine bed down which the twin would be most likely to flee should their advance be discovered. Silently Buckmaster and Higgins melted into the bushes, and Rutherford, crouching into a bed of ferns, edged closer to the ravine.

Before he had taken a dozen steps he caught a glimpse of a gaunt, black hound as it came out of the brush near the point where the twin had vanished. Rutherford froze into immobility, holding his breath and hoping against hope that it would not discover his presence. Then it caught the man scent and lifted its head with a long howl of warning.

"Hell!" exploded Rutherford, leaping over a log and dashing toward that ravine at top speed.

OUT of the corner of his eye he saw Buckmaster come crashing in from one side, and an instant later both of them broke into a small, open glen, followed a split second later by Higgins. The three halted and stared about them curiously. The crude distillery was going full blast, a smoldering fire beneath the boiler and the clear, beading liquor dropping steadily from the worm into a fruit jar, but the owner had vanished.

"Gone!" ejaculated Higgins, holstering his revolver. "Which way do y'u reckon he took?"

"Never saw hide nor hair of him," replied Buckmaster. "Him an' that hound dog make an unbeatable pair, eh?"

"Aces wired," agreed Rutherford ruefully. "That hound can wind a man at a hundred yards easy, an' one howl was enough for 'Lige—or 'Bige."

"Which one do y'u think it was, sheriff?" inquired Higgins, smothering a grin.

Rutherford pulled his mustaches and gazed into the fire. Then he turned to Buckmaster.

"What's yore guess, Lance?" he countered. "Who ought we to swear the warrant out for?"

"'Lige," replied Buckmaster uncertainly.

"How about you, Cal?"

Higgins chuckled silently.

"'Bige," he chanced.

Rutherford managed a grin as he reached into his pocket and drew out a silver dollar.

"Heads it's 'Lige, tails it's 'Bige," he declared, flipping the coin ten feet over his head. It struck the ground, rolled a few inches, and came to a rest leaning vertically against a billet of firewood. For an interminable instant he stared at it while the two deputies made a supreme effort to suppress their laughter.

"You can't beat 'em, sheriff," burst out Buckmaster at last, "not even with heads an' tails."

Rutherford shrugged in resignation, and then stooped and picked up the coin.

"I guess you're right, Lance," he agreed reluctantly. "No use of makin' an arrest. We might as well cut up this outfit an' go home."

It was a thumper keg still—an innovation in the hills—and the trio examined it with keen interest. By means of a small keg suspended between the boiler and the condenser, the "sugar top" moonshine was distilled in a continuous process by which the old "backin' an' twistin'" method had been eliminated. The resultant liquor, according to report, possessed the kick of a mule, although the quality was inferior to the "doubled dew."

With the owner's ax they destroyed the vats of mash, containers, and all the equipment except the copper boiler and worm, and the eight gallons of finished product which they found hidden near by.

These they carried back to the county seat in order to collect the fifty-dollar bounty, and as the gathering shadows of darkness closed about them, they filed silently down the trail toward their horses.

ON the night before court convened, Sheriff Rutherford, Deputy Buckmaster and two or three others were in the office of "Roaring Rufe" McCay, prosecuting attorney, checking up on rules issued for witnesses in the cases docketed. Henderson Yates, the county clerk and a Wirt Hammond adherent, dropped in shortly before nine o'clock and sat down beside the open window.

"I hear the twins showed you up again last week, Rutherford," he jeered with a chuckle. "They say that 'Lige's dog treed you for a coon."

"Trouble is," returned the sheriff thoughtfully, "that too many folks want them twins to keep outta my hands. They want to put the blame on me. Still, I ain't got but one thing to say, Yates," he continued after a pregnant pause, "an' that is, I've got three months before election, an' you can tell Hammond that if I don't settle the account with the Cantrell twins by that time I'll withdraw from the sheriff's race."

An apparition, looming suddenly in the open door, interrupted Rutherford, who for an instant stared uncomprehendingly. Then with a startled ejaculation he leaped to his feet, recognizing beneath the crimson-stained bandages the features of Tilden Honeycutt, the county treasurer. In three strides he was beside the injured man, leading him to a chair.

"What happened, Til?" he demanded solicitiously.

"Got held up an' robbed," replied Honeycutt, sinking weakly into a chair. "Ambushed, an' the bullet knocked me cold for a spell—jest barked my head, but I'm still shaky."

"How'd it happen, Til?" Rutherford's low, tense words betrayed the depths to which he had been disturbed. He and Honeycutt had been raised on adjoining farms, and had been close friends through nearly half a century. "Who was it, or did you see him?"

"'Twas one of them Cantrell twins," declared Honeycutt positively, grimacing with pain as he reached for the glass of water Buckmaster brought. "I don't know which one 'twas, but I couldn't be mistaken. I got a good look at him."

"Whar was he hid?"

"About two miles this side of No-Business Creek. I'd been holdin' one of my regular sets over in the back side

of the county, an' I was ridin' back along the river road when a gun blazed in my face. I reckon I was knocked off my hoss, because the next thing I knew I was flat on my back blinkin' at that Cantrell twin who was stuffin' the tax money in his pockets. I played possum because I knew he'd finish me if he thought I recognized him or even knew that I was still alive. Somehow I managed to get back on my hoss when the twin had gone, an' I hurried on in."

"How much money did he get?" inquired Buckmaster.

"A little the rise of eighteen hundred dollars."

"You're shore 'twas one of the twins?" Rutherford was rocking gently on his toes and heels.

"Saw him plain as day."

Rutherford tensed with determination and wheeled toward Buckmaster.

"Get ready!" he barked sharply. "We're ridin'."

"Just a minute, chief!" Higgins stepped between Rutherford and the door. "I believe we can put the deadwood on this bird so's thar won't be no tanglin' the two of 'em up when the trial comes off."

Rutherford frowned impatiently.

"Spill it quick!" he ordered. "We've got no time to lose."

"ONE of them twins is over at the pool room now," explained Higgins. "He's been in town since noon. I jest come from over thar, an' he's been in a quarter kelly pool game since six o'clock. Naturally he couldn't have staged this holdup. Why can't we go over thar an' get him—hold him in jail—an' then we'd know damn well t'other twin was the bird who done this job. All we'd have to do would be go get him an' hold him in a cell all by himself."

"If we catch him," grunted Rutherford, trying to hide his elation over the suggestion. "Meantime, what 'll we arrest this twin for? You jest said he couldn't be the one who shot Til."

He glanced hopefully at Roaring Rufe, and the latter leaped to his feet.

"Go get him!" he bellowed. "We'll hold him as a material witness."

The twin glanced up as the sheriff and his two aides entered the pool room and then completed his shot with utter nonchalance.

"I reckon you'd best come with us, son," said Rutherford softly.

"What have I done this time?" queried the Cantrell with a twisted grin.

"Nothin' in particular. We're jest tryin' to keep you from doin' somethin'."

The twin submitted with a shrug and quietly suffered himself to be led to the jail. There, at the sheriff's request, the prisoner was locked in the strongest cell, and then the three officers strode to the street where Rutherford gazed speculatively at the high-riding, silvery moon over the eastern horizon.

"Saddle the hosses, boys," he ordered succinctly.

On the long ride through the hills, Rutherford impatiently held his mount to a slow trot, the only pace possible over part of the trail. In vain he sought to suppress his jubilant confidence in the outcome. He somehow sensed the fact that the solution of his knottiest problem was in sight. For the first time in the history of the county court conviction seemed not only possible, but probable. Nevertheless his exultation had no effect upon

his caution and the thoroughness with which he laid his plans for the highwayman's capture.

It was almost three o'clock in the morning when they reached the edge of the clearing about old Gideon's cabin, and, leaving their horses hitched in a deep thicket, they slipped forward silently with the intention of taking the twin by surprise. At the orchard fence Rutherford halted and remained wrapped in thought for a full minute.

"I reckon mebbe we'd best wait for daylight," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I'd plum forgot all about that hound dog at the still t'other day. He'll yelp a warnin' an' the twin 'll scoot for the red brush."

The sheriff's gaze wandered about the clearing, picking out the various points of vantage in the clear moonlight.

"Lance, you skirt this orchard," he advised softly, "an' get in back of the house. Pick out a good cover an' stay holed up till daylight. Cal, you do the same on the left there. That clump of sassafras bushes on that little knoll looks good. I'll stick in front here, an' both of you watch me when daybreak comes. When I close in you come runnin'."

Keeping well under the cover of the orchard fence, Rutherford circled about in front of the cabin, and at the end of a quarter of an hour he found a position which suited his fancy—a depression fringed with high weeds about ninety or a hundred yards from the house. The minutes dragged slowly, and several times he shifted his position to relieve the painful cramps and twinges of rheumatism, for the night was damp and chilly and the mists were creeping in from the valley below. At last the moon dropped behind the western range of hills and then came an hour of almost impenetrable darkness.

BY imperceptible degrees the east began to grow gray with the dawn, and suddenly a light appeared in one of the windows of the cabin. Old Gideon, an early riser, was building a fire in the kitchen. The sheriff straightened and tried to stamp the stiffness from his tired old legs.

The light was sufficient for his purpose, and Rutherford advanced into the open to show himself to his deputies. Then, forgetful of everything save that his quarry was in the cabin, he advanced swiftly across the field. Fifty yards distant from the house he caught a glimpse of Higgins as the latter closed in, and at the same instant the sudden and vociferous baying of the hound brought two men to the door of the cabin. Rutherford grunted his satisfaction when he saw that one of them was the man he sought.

If the twin had any thought of attempting an escape, he gave no indication of it, but waited silently, immobile, until Rutherford entered the yard. Then the two hillmen stepped out upon the porch.

"Mornin', sheriff!" greeted Gideon, curiosity delineated in every feature of his gaunt face.

"Mornin', Gideon!" Rutherford stepped upon the porch, shook hands with the old man and nodded to the twin. "Hate to pester you so early, Gideon, but I reckon yore son'll have to go back with us."

"What's the charge this time?" cut in the youth sharply.

"Highway robbery an' assault with intent to kill."

Old Gideon winced at the baldness of that statement and gazed from his son to the sheriff and back again.

"Are ye shore 'twas my boy, Rutherford?" he asked after a poignant silence.

"Reasonable certain."

"Know whar my brother is?" demanded the twin, a crafty smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

"I think he stayed in town last night."

The youth's grin widened and he seemed to relax his tension as he rolled and lighted a cigarette.

"All right, sheriff!" he acquiesced. "Reckon ye'll wait till I've had my breakfast."

"Shore! We ain't in no hurry—now."

Buckmaster appeared and joined Higgins at the foot of the steps.

"Bring yore men inside, Rutherford," invited Gideon with inherent hospitality. "We'll 'rastle up a bite to eat an' a cup of coffee. Then I'll go to town with ye an' see about bondin' my boy."

"Sorry, Gideon," Rutherford shook his head sadly. "You can't bond him this time. This is highway robbery an' the grand jury'll return an indictment to-day. We'll get this case tried this week—mebbe Friday."

"Ain't that kinda rushin' things up a leetle?" Old Gideon halted in surprise.

"Mebbe so, but there ain't sense in carryin' it over till next term."

The twin's eyes narrowed and the muscles of his jaws knotted and grew taut. Then, with a laugh, he tossed away his cigarette and turned back into the house.

"The quicker the better," he called over his shoulder. "Two, three days ort to be enough for me to get ready for trial—providin' ye tell me somethin' about this robbery I'm charged with."

"You'll know in plenty of time, son," promised the sheriff grimly.

WHEN the developments of the night became noised about the little county seat that day, small knots of the citizenry began to gather in the streets, talking of but one thing—the robbery, and the arrest of the Cantrell twins. 'Bige and 'Lige, each held without bail, occupied cells at the opposite ends of the corridor in the jail, and every precaution was exercised to prevent communication with each other. Neither was any outsider permitted to see them.

At ten o'clock that morning the grand jury returned a true bill of highway robbery and felonious assault against 'Bige Cantrell and before the noon recess in court Roaring Rufe had docketed the case for the following Friday morning. As Rutherford had promised, old Gideon had failed to bond out either of his sons.

Attorney Rockby Harrison appeared in court with a motion to release 'Lige Cantrell, contending that he was not a material witness in that, according to the sheriff's own statement, he could not possibly have been within miles of the scene of the crime at the time it was committed.

Roaring Rufe McCay cleared his throat.

"Paradoxical as it may seem," he declared sententiously, "Elijah Cantrell is a material witness as long as he remains locked in jail. We know he is innocent and by keeping him in his cell the guilty man, his brother, is automatically identified."

The judge overruled the motion, and 'Lige stayed in jail.

The news of the trial spread with such uncanny rapidity back through the hill country that by Thursday night

the little town was filled to overflowing with visitors. Many of these were friends of the twins, and because of this Rutherford threw a guard of three men about the jail to prevent an attempted delivery during the night. Then he snatched a few hours of sleep after midnight upon a cot in his office.

Shortly after daybreak he was awakened by some one pounding upon his door, and, instinctively realizing that some unexpected development in the Cantrell trial had arisen, he sprang to his feet and admitted his visitor, one of the trio of guards.

"One of them twins escaped," he announced breathlessly.

Rutherford tensed.

"Which'n?"

"The one in number nine."

"That's 'Lige—the witness." The sheriff relaxed with a sigh of relief. "How'd he get out?"

"Cut through the brick with an old case knife."

"What time did it happen?"

"Nobody knows. The jailer discovered it a few minutes ago."

An arresting thought struck Rutherford with such force that he caught his breath.

"Did you look in 'Bige's cell?" he demanded. "Had they got together?"

"No. We looked there, but 'Lige had hightailed it for the brush."

"Good!" Rutherford reached for his trousers. "You go back to the jail an' see that nobody gets near 'Bige's cell till court convenes."

Rutherford dressed swiftly, more deeply disturbed by 'Lige's escape than he wanted to admit. The mere fact that he had broken jail was proof that he was going to attempt some further coup, otherwise he would have remained in his cell until the trial was over, when he would have been released. Vaguely wondering what strategy would be attempted, he was determined to guard the prisoner so closely that it would be impossible for any one to get close to him.

He found Buckmaster at breakfast in the hotel.

"'Lige broke jail last night," he announced to his deputy casually.

"No?" Buckmaster paused in the act of reaching for the sugar bowl.

"After breakfast," he continued guardedly so that none of the others in the room could hear him, "you an' Higgins post yoreselves at the courthouse door, an' if 'Lige tries to sneak in grab him. Watch all old women wearin' them poke-bonnets."

FULLY half an hour before court convened the crowd began massing in the street and trickling into the courthouse where they quickly filled the court room, each spectator anxious to secure a seat as near the railing as possible. There was a sprinkling of townsmen, but the majority present were hillmen from the back reaches of the county. At least a quarter of an hour before court opened every seat was filled and small groups were gathered here and there in the corridors and aisles.

The judge, a white-haired jurist of the old school, appeared in the doorway of his private office just behind the bench and Rutherford stepped to the dais and officially opened court. Motioning to Buckmaster, he made his exit through the witness room and then down the corridor. On reaching the street he waited for the deputy.

"We'll fetch 'Bige over," he declared, glancing about him and half expecting to see some sign of an attempted rescue. "When we start back with him I want you to walk three or

four paces in front—an' keep yore eyes skinned."

Buckmaster nodded, searching the straggling loiterers about the square.

"Higgins is on watch from Hartley's store across the street," advised the deputy. "Two of the guards are on the lookout—one in the clerk's office an' t'other is inside the court room. Looks like we've got him sewed up in case 'Lige makes a break."

"Good!" approved the sheriff.

A minute or so later they entered the jail and were conducted to 'Bige's cell. Rutherford debated for an instant whether he should handcuff the prisoner to his own wrist, but he rejected the idea because, if trouble should arise, he wanted both hands free for action.

The square was deserted when they crossed it, but it was not until they entered a side door in the courthouse that the sheriff relaxed his tense grip on 'Bige's arm. On the narrow stairway up to the court room they were forced to ascend in single file in order to pass two or three loungers who stared at 'Bige with undisguised interest. At the top of the steps Buckmaster turned off to the right, through the witness room in order to avoid coming in contact with the crowd of spectators in the court room.

Near the door of this witness room stood old Gideon, who nodded to 'Bige, but offered no word of greeting to the deputy. The old hillman was visibly perturbed, and as Rutherford started to pass Gideon blocked him.

"Have ye recaptured 'Lige yet?" he demanded hoarsely, placing his gnarled hand on the sheriff's arm.

"No, Gideon. He got clean away." For an instant Rutherford suspected some ruse, but he dismissed the thought, shook Gideon off and hurried on into the court room.

On the threshold he paused, surprised into rigid immobility. Amid an intense silence Deputy Buckmaster strode heavily toward the defense table and three paces behind him slouched the twins, 'Lige and 'Bige, side by side, each simulating complete unconcern in the palpable excitement their appearance had aroused. Buckmaster, unaware of the addition to his party, faced about and his jaws sagged in utter amazement.

In a flash Rutherford realized how the ruse had been staged. 'Lige had slipped into the courthouse during the night and hidden himself behind the door in the witness room, and old Gideon had halted the sheriff long enough for 'Lige to join his brother without attracting Buckmaster's attention.

ROARING RUFE came ponderously to his feet with the manifest intention of saying something, but evidently he reconsidered, for he sat down with even more abruptness than he had arisen and stared at Rutherford, a dozen unasked questions mirrored on his face. Rockby Harrison, with a complacent smile on his face, motioned to the twins, indicating that both of them take a seat behind the defense table. Then, with an expression of smug satisfaction, he settled back to await whatever action the prosecution might take.

Rutherford advanced swiftly across the room and leaned over Roaring Rufe's ear.

"Offer to compromise with a ten-year sentence in the penitentiary," he whispered to the attorney.

"Ten year—hell!" snorted Roaring Rufe. "We can't get a ten-day sentence in jail. How are ye going to untangle 'em this time?"

"I think mebbe it can be done," promised Rutherford with an enigmatical smile. "Go on an' offer the compromise an' see what Rock has to say."

Roaring Rufe arose hesitantly, with every vestige of his ordinarily bombastic confidence gone. For an instant he gazed at the twins intently, and then he shook his head in baffled bewilderment.

"Your honor," intoned McCay, "if you will grant us a few minutes I feel that perhaps we might reach a compromise in this case."

The judge nodded in agreement and the two lawyers with their clients, accompanied by Rutherford, adjourned to the jury room for a conference. Harrison's grin was sarcastic and confident when they faced each other beside the table.

"Well," he drawled with a chuckle, "do you want to dismiss the case?"

"On the contrary," replied Roaring Rufe, bluffing hard, "the Commonwealth will be satisfied with a sentence of ten years at hard labor in the State penitentiary."

Harrison's eyes narrowed and he stared at Roaring Rufe as if he thought the latter had lost his senses. Then he laughed ironically.

"I imagine a ten-year sentence would be agreeable to the prosecution, particularly since its able counsel has not the slightest idea which of the two men at my table he is trying to convict. On the other hand, I would suggest that the Commonwealth *nolle prosse* this case and that it be stricken from the docket."

At that moment the judge appeared in the door and stood peering through his glasses at the group.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "have you reached an agreement?"

"There is no possibility of a compromise, your honor," cut in Harrison quickly. "We will go to trial."

SHERIFF RUTHERFORD opened his mouth in silent laughter, and then stepped forward and addressed the judge gravely.

"May it please the cou't," he began formally, thoroughly enjoying the dramatic dénouement he was staging, "I think mebbe I can convince both sides of the wisdom of agreein' on a compromise verdict." Out of the corner of his eye he saw Harrison's smile fade.

"The cou't," continued Rutherford in a soft drawl, "may not know the facts in this case, so I reckon I'd best tell you what happened. One of these twins here robbed Til Honeycutt t'other night—shot him off his hoss an' took eighteen hundred dollars off'n him. T'other twin was here in town when it happened—'twas the day he was tried for moonshinin'. Just as soon as I got the news I went over to the poolroom an' arrested this innocent twin, lockin' him up as a material witness. Then I went out to Gideon's place an' put the other twin onder arrest, because I knew 'twas him done it. Til is ready to swear 'twas one of them, but he didn't know which. This innocent twin I kept locked up in number nine cell and we put the guilty one in number two. Last night the one in number nine broke jail. He was the witness, you onderstand. I kinda figgered they'd try to get together an' befuddle things, an' shore enough the lad who escaped was hidin' in the witness room out thar, an' the rest you know. But, yore honor, their trick didn't work. Get this straight, boys!"

He shot a wide grin of elation at the tense group and went on:

"As I said a minute ago, I kinda figgered they'd try to get together, an' when I brought the prisoner across from the jail—the man who had been in number two cell an' who done the robbery—I branded him so's I could recognize him if his brother showed up. I made a heavy chalk mark onder his right arm on the sleeve of his overall jacket."

Consternation flew to the face of one of the twins and he raised his right arm and examined it. A glance showed Rutherford that the mark was visible even from where he stood, and he sat down with a chuckle of satisfaction.

Harrison, his face the picture of dismay, held a hurried conference with the twins. Apparently they realized the futility of standing trial because the marked twin shrugged in resignation and Harrison turned toward Roaring Rufe.

"We accept your compromise offer," he said in a small voice.

Rutherford drew near the crestfallen twins and laid his hand upon the chalked arm.

"Come on, 'Bige," he said pleasantly. "This is one time I don't think yore brother will be so blamed anxious to swap places with ye."

THE END.

Garden of Allah

TOURISTS in Africa along the Mediterranean coast will be advised to see the Ouled-Naïl dancers, and rush down to Biskra, perhaps, in the hopes of eying something extraordinary in the way of dancing and dance girls. The tourist may be disappointed, but the dancers are extraordinary, indeed. They come from a range of stern mountains in the country of Ziban, and, whereas their sisters of the profession may come from any group or nationality as a sort of outcast, the entire Ouled-Naïl race is trained to dance.

The girls are taught the art almost from infancy, trained by mothers who had been dancers trained by the mothers before them. There is no stigma attached to the profession by the Ouled-Naïl. Dancing is their racial heritage. The child practices the gestures and songs and intricate steps for years, much in the manner of the Cambodian temple girls. She learns the art of make-up, how to moan out the desert love lyrics, how to flaunt her costumes at the dark-eyed visitors to the café, how to save her money with an eye on a future husband and a home back in the mountains.

Perhaps it is the elaborate costume that disappoints the tourist. He could see more daring outfits back in the old home town burlesque house. The Ouled-Naïl girl wears a flowing dress littered with spangles; her ankles and wrists are weighted with jewelry. She paints red the tips of her fingers, tattooes her face, puts mascara in her eyes. She whirls and snaps her fingers and croons out of key. But the Arabs watch entranced and fling her coins and fight over her smile. She loses no reputation with her mountain people; the Ouled-Naïl girl who cannot dance is the one deplored.

Theodore Roscoe.

"Stay wit' him, boys!" McGuire commanded

Almost a Gentleman

Faced with an unescapable underworld challenge, young Joe Leander plays a hazardous game to save an innocent girl and himself from gangland's toils

By ROBERT TERRY SHANNON

Author of "The Resurrection of Red O'Laughlan," "Once in a Lifetime," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOE LEANDER, boy of the streets who has grown up in a gangster environment, meets Eleanor Giddings, niece of Harrison Howe, a genial host of the Great White Way, and when she insists, takes her to a gangster dive. The proprietor, Horse McGuire, wishing to start things with Tony Zelig's mob, with which Joe is connected, gets offensive. Joe gets the drop and escapes with her.

He learns that McGuire is blackmailing her fiancé, Lee Martin, the lawyer who had saved Joe from an unjust murder charge. Joe chivalrously decides to remove McGuire's menace. Eleanor hurries to Tony Zelig's, to dissuade Joe, just in time to see McGuire's men bump Zelig off. Joe makes a get-away with Eleanor.

Fighting against his hopeless infatuation for her, Joe meets Helen Reed, a sophisticated but thoroughly nice and likable chorus girl, at a party of Harri-

This story began in the Argosy for October 12.

son Howe's. She shows him a published photograph of himself and the murdered Zelig which the police have discovered; but tells him she knows he isn't really hard—that he's almost a gentleman.

Joe, still trying to save Eleanor and Martin, bursts in on a conference between McGuire and his lieutenants, Kid Blood and Billy the Goat. He challenges McGuire to play poker for Martin's notes, and wins; then the three jump him, trying to get the pistol with which he had the drop on them.

CHAPTER XI—*(Continued).*

A LONG GAMBLE.

A HEAVY blow was dealt upon the back of Joe's neck; his jarred intelligence warned him that he could not retain the gun longer with the three of them grabbing his wrist and arm. With a desperate heave he managed to hurl it through the glass of a window where it fell into a courtyard. He was fairly sure none of his foes was armed, else they would have shot him before this.

"Nail him, Billy!" Kid Blood cried excitedly.

Billy the Goat swung a wicked fist at Joe's face, but the blow glanced impotently off the skull. Kid Blood, without a weapon in his hand, was not a dangerous opponent; he threw his arm around Joe's waist, but a short punch to the chin easily loosened his grasp.

It was McGuire, Joe instinctively realized, who would be the hardest to fight off; Joe would not have much trouble in handling these two lesser gangsters. Without their guns they were devoid of immediate deadly menace. Still, when they both rushed in from either side it required all his energy to return blow for blow and, at the same time, keep from being upset.

Kicking out, Joe managed to overturn the card table and it fell as a temporary obstacle between him and McGuire. Even so, he noted the crafty approach of the other, who had grasped the whisky bottle by its short neck; crouching slightly, McGuire got free of the intervening table and circled around the edge of the struggle.

Joe hammered impartially at the faces of Kid Blood and Billy the Goat; his fast, vicious blows were marking them.

Throughout his whole being he was cool with an impersonal calmness born out of his desperation. He noted, even, that the nose of Billy the Goat was shedding blood. He felt his knuckles cut the flesh of Kid Blood's cheek; he heard the impact of a fist against his own jaw. In a man-to-man struggle his two principal antagonists might have lacked courage, but together they kept after him with vicious persistence.

Horse McGuire, for his part, wasted no energy. Constantly he was drawing closer to Joe, who felt a slowly increasing weariness throughout his muscles, unaccustomed to such unfailing activity.

"Stay wit' him, boys," McGuire urged. "Get his arms down at his sides."

Billy the Goat made an unsuccessful attempt to close with Joe, but for a moment, he was driven off by a swift jab to his chin and he paused to clamp a hand over this spot. There was a brief space in which Kid Blood and Joe traded punches; neither man guarding himself, but attempting recklessly to fell the other.

In the midst of this McGuire hit Joe with the heavy bottle. Only in the nick of time had Joe moved his head slightly so that the blow was deflected to some extent by the movement. McGuire hit him once more and a thick pain above an ear began to spread over his whole head. He fought with increasing weariness. His three foes fell upon him with concerted eagerness, beating at his face and head.

It was remarkable that he could sustain so much punishment, but he continued to fight with all his ebbing strength. Billy the Goat, at his back, was pulling him downward.

"Somebody lay him out!" the rising voice of Kid Blood implored.

ONCE more Horse McGuire swung the bottle and it broke on top of Joe's head. There was no sense of pain. It seemed as though the floor had flown up and hit him. He was down, he realized, and heavy feet crashed against his ribs. It came to him, curiously, that his money and Lee Martin's I. O. U.'s were still safely in his pocket. He saw his three assailants through a mist. Kid Blood was drawing back a little, his mouth distorted; Billy the Goat's face was a red smear; Horse McGuire's leg was drawn back to a kick. Clumsily, Joe grasped the ankle of it and clung on.

"Pick up something and sock him wit' it!" commanded McGuire practically. "Can't either of you bums crack his skull?"

Joe's dull gaze saw Kid Blood possess himself of a bronze paper cutter that had remained neglected on McGuire's desk. His sallow fingers closed around the hilt; there was more than enough vicious strength left in the killer to drive the daggerlike thing deep into Joe's vitals.

Still on the floor, Joe understood, all at once, that Kid Blood meant to stab him to death.

The instinct of the killer was sufficiently deadly to make Kid Blood lust for actual murder, whatever the weapon. Too dazed for fear, Joe responded to an automatic instinct to preserve his life. He tried to scramble out of Kid Blood's range. Swiftly, like a cat, the others sprang at him; an arm rose and fell; Joe was conscious of a burning streak of pain in his shoulder. Luckily he had drifted in time to thwart the accuracy of Kid Blood's drive.

The blade had cut into the flesh and reëstablished the sensation of pain which ran through him like an electric alarm summoning all of his flagging resources once more into action. His brain cleared and began haphazardly to function. He remembered why he had come here—for Eleanor Giddings! Lee Martin was only a blank in his mind; he saw Eleanor's blue eyes, the whole lovely expression of her face, in a swimming consciousness.

Above him, in a room of hopeless confusion, he saw the contorted, hysterical features of Kid Blood; saw the sallow hand grasping the dull and d r i p p i n g metal of the paper-knife stiletto.

If he wanted to live, Joe realized, he must get out of here at once.

Out of an immense dizziness he reached a chair with his hands and began to pull himself upward. Stooping, Horse McGuire slugged him behind the ear; the blow made Joe's head roll, but, with a mighty effort, he recovered and dragged himself still higher. They were all on him now, beating him everywhere. But death did not yet strike him, although the sleeve of his

coat was ripped by one downward swoop of the bronze blade.

"Damn him, he's still alive!" screamed Kid Blood. "Sock him again, McGuire!"

Kid Blood's excitement seemed to infect the other two. McGuire swung and missed grotesquely.

SOMETHING new came to Joe—something like the second wind that revives a spent runner. Through the young arms and young body came back a reserve strength energizing him with a wild, unrestrained fury.

Without exactly comprehending how he managed it, Joe found himself on his feet. He still clung to the chair; backing, he found he was against a wall that blocked further retreat in that direction.

Then, suddenly, the pack flew at him, converging like wolves upon a helpless prey. Kid Blood, slower than the others, moved at him from the front, the bronze knife gleaming dully in his hand. Joe understood that, although he had escaped the blade time after time, it would inevitably reach him unless he could now, once and for all, end its menace. He had a feeling that his cruelly beaten body was acting independently of his mind. His arms, grasping the chair, rose in the air, and descended with a splintering crash upon the head of Kid Blood.

Joe's hands were now free. Billy the Goat went reeling when Joe struck out and caught him full in the face. Only McGuire remained upright and able to continue the fight. Breathing deeply, Joe turned to face this last enemy, but stopped in utter surprise.

Horse McGuire was already defeated by some inner force that had collapsed. The will to combat no longer existed in him and he shrunk back against the wall, a bewildered amazement wiping out all ferocity from his face.

CHAPTER XII.

INTO DANGER.

JOE'S first thought was to escape from the place as speedily as possible. He had attained his full purpose, but something was holding him here, some magnet of shocked curiosity and surprise. As his mind cleared it became apparent that his victory was astonishingly complete.

Kid Blood on the floor was definitely unconscious and helpless. The final blow to Billy the Goat had deprived him of all fighting energy, and he was sitting foolishly in the chair, tenderly fingering the bruises on his face. McGuire, pale and wavering against the wall, remained in the grip of a paralysis that held him in the icy tentacles of panicky fear.

Shaking his head to clear it, wiping his face with a handkerchief, Joe sensed the surge of extraordinary accomplishment in his breast. Having defeated three enemies, they no longer possessed the slightest threat; in exact proportion to their demoralization Joe's own vitality and assurance rose.

"Straighten out that fellow on the floor, and let's see what's the matter with him," he commanded sharply.

Reluctantly, since he was not used to obeying orders, Horse McGuire threw aside the broken chair that encumbered Kid Blood's head and rolled him over on his back. A swollen lump like a knob at the corner of his forehead showed purple. It became apparent at once that the bludgeoning had not killed him; he opened his eyes and struggled to a sitting position.

Across the room, Billy the Goat found his voice.

"I'll say this for you, Leander," he observed, not without admiration, "you sure do know how to knock a man down with a chair."

And from the floor, looking up with dazed eyes, Kid Blood spoke out of his bewilderment.

"Johnny Risko ain't the India rubber man," he said, groggily. "If a truck hit you, Leander, it would bounce off!"

Joe glanced at them contemptuously. He knew them for what they were—yellow-hearted rats, willing now to curry favor with the one who was strong enough to defeat them individually and, overwhelmingly more important, able to humble the pretenses of their leader. This was the way of the underworld; loose, shifting ties. Alliances existed only as long as they remained advantageous, and leaders held sway only so long as they were able to enforce their power.

Limited in mentality and poverty stricken in character Kid Blood and Billy the Goat were no worse than a thousand others of their ilk. Despite their brave words of devotion to Horse McGuire, they were looking with fawning eyes upon the vigorous champion from the Zelig mob. Single-handed he had walked into Horse McGuire's headquarters and wrecked it. The details didn't matter.

McGUIRE sensed the shift in allegiance. Later he would come to understand what that black bitterness of feeling was which is the portion of all men who taste ingratitude. He was vain, arrogant and, therefore, at a loss when deprived of his symbols of power. Given sufficient time for recuperation, he would become the truculent bully of old, but now, in the bogs of defeat, he could only scowl hopelessly while his knees trembled. Joe Leander, he recognized, was gifted with irresistible strength.

"It looks like you and me were fools to tangle," Horse said in a new tone of respect to Joe. "I guess we both lost our heads."

Kid Blood tried laboriously to be funny. "I'm the one that damn near lost his head," he said, rubbing the purple lump on his forehead.

There was no reason in common sense for Joe to linger; there was no particular satisfaction in his triumph save that he had obtained Martin's I. O. U.'s. But he was still excited, keyed to a high pitch.

"My advice to you, McGuire, is to get out of this town as fast as you can. When you bumped Tony Zelig, you signed your own death warrant. I'm giving you this advice free."

Joe's words were not without effect. McGuire, emerging from the welter of personal violence, was peculiarly susceptible to fear at the moment. His countenance weakened still more.

"Ain't there some way," he asked, "that we can fix all this business up?"

"You can't ever fix anything up with me," Joe told him flatly.

"Maybe we been going at things in entirely the wrong way," McGuire protested eagerly. "I ain't never held nothing personal against you, Leander. If you fellows want to let bygones be bygones, I'd be perfectly willing to do the same. If you're going to take charge of Zelig's mob, this might be a good time for all of us to bury the hatchet. We can declare a new deal all around."

The withering scorn of the man and all that he represented curled through Joe's blood. Tony Zelig had been a

tough egg. But Joe could never enter into friendly agreement with the man who had given Tony the works.

"Don't try to hand me that soap, McGuire!" he spat out. "I've told you what you can do. You can get out of town as fast as you can. You'll have a fifty-fifty chance to save your rotten life. From now on the streets of New York ain't safe for you and your cowardly rats."

The look of uncertainty about Horse McGuire's pallid eyes increased. Joe Leander swung his back upon the disordered room and its human contents. Without molestation, he walked out of the place, indifferent to his own bruises and disarray.

ONCE on the street, Joe realized that it would be wise to leave the neighborhood immediately. His head was still a little dizzy; throughout his whole body was an unnatural lassitude. Walking rapidly, he started toward his flat.

The precious scraps of paper that removed all menace from the coming marriage between Lee Martin and Eleanor Giddings were safely in his pocket. His immediate task was to restore these all-important I. O. U.'s to Lee Martin immediately. When that was done his work was ended.

By the same token his association with the beautiful girl was over forever. His teeth clamped together. For once in a lifetime he had risen to some hitherto unexplored altitude of human altruism; and it was so painful that he dared not think about it lest he slip into an abyss of suffering that would be unendurable.

Once he caught sight of his reflection in the plate glass window of a store as he passed; he was shocked to recognize himself as the disheveled, swollen-faced figure. People were beginning to look at him curiously and his pride of appearance was touched. A passing taxicab responded to his signal and he rode in seclusion to his flat.

Ed Fontella viewed him with consternation.

"You damn fool, you went out wit'-out a bodyguard!" Fontella gasped immediately. "You don't have to tell me —you run into some of the McGuire gang!"

Joe was not exactly in a daze; merely, his mind was filled with more poignant considerations than the surprise and perturbation of his partner.

"Run some of the water in the tub for me, Ed," he said, fatigue and determination mingled in his voice. "I need a hot bath and some clean clothes. And pour me a stiff drink."

Twenty minutes later he emerged from his battered state, looking almost like his old self. Ed Fontella had applied ice to the swollen places of his face and, fortunately, the bruises had not become discolored. Still, no man could take a beating such as Joe had endured without suffering extreme loss of vitality. He dropped into a chair and allowed the recuperative powers of his youth to begin the restoration of his spent forces.

"You got a lucky break to come out of it alive," Ed Fontella consoled him. "Tell me how it happened, Joe, and where?"

But Joe Leander had no intention of disclosing the real facts, even to his old pal. The name and the happiness of Eleanor Giddings was not going to be a subject of gang conversation or ethics.

"Aw, I met some of those birds on the street and it was just a common curbstone battle," he murmured. "I didn't even recognize the guys I was

fightin' wit'. Forget it, Ed. Do me a favor—look up Lee Martin's telephone number and get him on the wire for me, will you?"

"Lee Martin, the lawyer? What do you want wit' a mouthpiece?"

"It ain't nothin' like that at all, Ed," Joe returned negligently. "I just want to see him about a little piece of money I owe him. Nothing important."

Lee Martin, however, could not be reached at his office and his stenographer did not know where he was. Joe left the flat and from a telephone booth in a near-by cigar store called up Eleanor Giddings.

"WHERE can I find Lee Martin?" he asked her, his voice suppressing the thrill he always felt when he talked to her. "I tried his office, but—"

He detected a new strain of distress in her response. Her own poise, like his own, had begun to shatter under the continuous pressure of emotion and danger.

"I want to see you. I *must* see you!" she breathed.

He told himself desperately that it was but futile self-torture to see her again. No, he had to summon his will power and resist the temptation to rush once more to her side."

"There's no need for me to see you again," he stated carefully. "I got what I wanted from McGuire—those notes Martin signed. Understand? What I want to do now is to put them in his hands and tell him that he won't have to worry any more. You can go ahead with the wedding and—and God bless you both."

There was a muffled sound from the other end of the wire as though Eleanor had choked a sob.

"Not thirty minutes ago," she returned unhappily, "Lee called me up. I think he had been drinking. He told me he was leaving then to go down to McGuire's. Joe, I'm afraid, I'm afraid—"

Her voice trailed off into broken distress. Joe felt the keen thrust of a new apprehension in his own breast. Lee Martin was a fool! There was no telling what brutality Horse McGuire might not work upon the lawyer now. Having been beaten once, McGuire might well have started lashing himself into a frenzy of vicious ferocity.

Deprived of his legal weapon to extract money from Lee Martin the cold bestiality of the thug might develop into a thirst for pursuing physical revenge. It was conceivable, even, that he might kill Lee Martin. These thoughts in the mind of Joe Leander were not moonshine; they were based upon long and accurate observation of the workings of criminal psychology.

McGuire, inevitably, would endeavor to salve his own defeat and humiliation by an immediate triumph of some sort. If Lee Martin crossed McGuire's path at this time, it was a dead certainty that Eleanor's fiancé was in for serious trouble.

"Do you know any way," he asked, striving to keep his voice calm, "we can head off Martin before he gets there?"

But she did not bother to answer him directly: "Joe, are you all right?"

"Yeh, I'm all right, But—"

"I'm afraid for Lee!" she cried. "I don't know why I have this terrible feeling that Lee is in some awful danger down there. Do you feel it, too?"

"It isn't the safest place on earth for him," Joe responded noncommittally. In reality, he distinctly shared Eleanor's apprehension. It was a strange thing, the way impending

trouble got into the air. Sometimes he could feel the approach of danger; it ran through his blood, a cold, jellylike substance. This extension of the senses, these premonitions were rare, but at times startlingly definite.

"I wouldn't worry if I was you," he assured her, but there was no ring of confidence in his voice. "I'll try to send somebody over and get Martin away from there."

SHE laughed, a strange, unnatural sound of mirth which was not mirth at all but the pitiful symbol of overwrought nerves and tense fear.

"You can't fool me!" she declared. "You will go yourself after him—and then I'll have both of you to be worried about."

"I keep telling you not to get excited!" Joe implored. "Everything's going to be all right."

"No, nothing is going to be all right," she responded with stubborn aversion to his optimism. "We're all caught up in some kind of whirlwind, Joe, and something terrible is going to happen. Did you have trouble with McGuire again to-day?"

Her intuitive state of mind reached him like an uncanny infection and his throat tightened. It was odd that she seemed to share his own forebodings to such a marked degree.

"I had trouble with McGuire, but I had all the luck," he told her. "You just take it easy and your troubles will all melt away. Get that through your head. I'm promising you—I'm giving you my word."

"You're going back to McGuire's yourself!" she pronounced with certainty.

It seemed so useless to lie to her. "Oh, sure, I'll go back, but nothing bad is going to happen. You're just nervous. Leave it to me, and before you know it everything 'll be jake."

He could feel the rising tide of her distress—her curious, firm instinct of danger. It rose around him, inundated his senses. There were new elements, new complications in this conflict that shook his established confidence in his own powers and the might of the Zelig mob. With Tony Zelig dead, anything might happen now. He could promise her anything, but his constricted heart had no longer any vigorous and brazen security. At best, he could only keep up his front and throw the old impudent bluff of underworld sophistication.

"In two hours from now I'll call you up and send Lee Martin back to you with a great big smile all over his face," Joe assured her. "All you gotta do is stay right there and read a book or magazine."

How little he knew all the quirks of character that made Eleanor Giddings an individual—the unexpected twists of reaction that gave her personality and separated her from a million other girls of her type and apparent temperament. What he did not realize was that beneath the polished surface of her breeding and charm was fire and metal and a volatile daring that could equal his own.

"I don't know what made you think I would be willing to sit here and twiddle my thumbs," she said, her voice strumming like a thin silver wire. "If Lee Martin is in danger down there, and you are, too, I'll just have to come down and join you. Don't argue with me, please."

"You're crazy!" he gasped.

"I guess I am," she agreed.

He tried to protest to her, but in the middle of his words she hung up the telephone on him. She was a fool, per-

verse, silly; but there was nothing he could do about it. Had she been a man, Joe Leander would have cursed her. Oh, the little fool! It didn't matter what happened to him; it wasn't overwhelmingly important what happened to Lee Martin, either. But if anything harmed a hair of Eleanor's head, life wouldn't be worth living—no, nor death worth dying.

CHAPTER XIII.

MURDER.

ED FONTELLA, when Joe returned to the flat, looked at his partner with baffled eyes. Dumbly Fontella's slow mind tried to fathom the mystery of the change that had made a different man, almost within twenty-four hours, of Joe Leander.

Physically, even, Joe was different. He wore his clothes less aggressively. There were new lines, new scowls, stamped on his face; the expression of his dark eyes was moody, introspective. A vast negligence surrounded him as though the old important affairs of life no longer had pressing significance.

An eerie conception disturbed Ed Fontella: a guy going to the electric chair might look like that.

Ed followed Joe into a bedroom.

"Just what in hell, kid, is eatin' you?" he demanded seriously.

Just for a moment Joe's eyes kindled as they rested upon the squat, ugly figure of the man who had been his closest pal. His mind told him that Ed Fontella was ignorant and disreputable, but a deeper voice reminded him, with a brief flooding emotion, that Ed had the virtue named loyalty.

"Quit worrying about me, Ed!" Joe said sharply.

"What you rummaging around in the dresser drawers for?" Ed demanded suspiciously.

"I'm looking for that extra gat of mine."

"Where's your regular gat?"

"I lost it."

"Like hell you lost it! Why don't you tell me the truth, Joe?"

"Aw, go to hell, will you? Lemme alone, Ed, I'm all right."

It was almost funny to see the ugly face of Ed Fontella begin to twitch and work. He looked for the world like a schoolboy about to break into tears. Funny how a hard guy could look like that.

"If you can't find your gat, I'll lend you this cannon of mine," Ed said thickly. "No, I won't do that, either. I'll go along with you, and we'll each carry our own cannon. Where you goin', Joe?"

"I'm going to the Y. M. C. A. and take a swim," Joe laughed harshly.

Ed put a heavy and somewhat dirty paw on Joe's sleeve. "Listen, kid, you are in a jam. I don't know what it is, and if you don't want to tell me, that's all right. We been pals a long while, and if you want to give me the air, I ain't got a word to say. The only thing is, if you're goin' where there's any shootin' takin' place, lemme go along. All I say is, lemme go along. Will you, Joe? Lemme go along."

Joe had found a loaded automatic to take the place of the one he had thrown out the window at McGuire's. Snugly it now rested in its holster under the coat, and, turning to Ed Fontella, he put the heel of his palm alongside Ed's head and gave him a rough, playful push. After all, Ed was a great guy in his own way. It would seem like insulting him to leave him out of the McGuire affair, especially

since Ed planned to become leader of the Zelig mob.

"ALL right, then, Ed; I'm going over and call on our friend McGuire again," Joe said sociably, lighting a cigarette. "It's a private dicker that McGuire is trying to pull off on a friend of mine, and I thought I might give both sides a little advice. Of course, McGuire might get rough and there might be trouble, but—"

"And you're tryin' to leave me out!" exploded Ed Fontella. "That ain't right, Joe!"

Even the harassed soul of Joe Leander had to smile at the naïve innocence of his partner.

"If it was gang business, Ed, I'd want you to take the lead, of course," Joe explained. "Can't you see how it is? I don't want to run you through the works on a private affair of mine. Why should you take any of the risk, when you don't know what it is all about?"

An ominous frown like a low-hanging storm-cloud gathered on the projecting brow of Ed Fontella. Visibly his face took on a leaden gloom.

"It was a woman who got you into this," he said in a voice of prophecy, "an' maybe it's goin' to take a friend like me to get you out of it, kid. You ain't yourself."

Joe glanced at his wrist watch. If he moved swiftly, there would easily be time enough for him to reach Horse McGuire's establishment before Eleanor Giddings could possibly get there. His plans were vague. First, he would have to get Lee Martin away from the place. If Martin had been drinking, he realized, that might be a difficult task.

But the imperative obligation was to head off Eleanor Giddings and forestall her feminine folly. He could hardly hope to reason with her. Looking back, he remembered that in all cases she had done exactly as she pleased. About the only thing that could influence her would be force. The assistance of Ed Fontella, under the circumstances, was not at all to be despised.

"There is a dame in this mix-up, Ed," he confessed. "She's high-class, and she is going to marry Lee Martin. I didn't want to mention it to you; I wanted to keep her name out of the whole business; but I guess you will have to know what's what. Martin is in a jam with McGuire, and the girl is on her way down to McGuire's now. I'm giving you the lay. We've got to keep her out of all this stuff. Do you think, Ed, that if we could grab her, you could drag her away in a taxi and bring her over here for a couple of hours and keep her from squawking?"

"Is she a dame you're crazy about?" Fontella demanded.

"No, she's just a friend, but I want her treated gentle, understand?"

Ed looked extremely unhappy.

"Why don't *you* give the dame the gentle handlin', like you say, and let me bust right in on McGuire?" he suggested. "I don't know nothin' about handlin' dames that way, but if you want Lee Martin got out of McGuire's place, I can do a job like that as good as you. Let me get a bunch of our fellas together and—"

"Nix!" Joe objected. "You're no good to me if you don't do exactly what I say. Take it or leave it, Ed—you've got to obey orders. What's it going to be?"

A shrug hunched Ed Fontella's shoulders. All of this sounded reckless and ill-advised to his rather methodical mind, but he recognized that Joe pos-

sessed a fire and a dash that he personally could never hope to equal.

"Any thing you say, kid."

TOGETHER they left the flat. A thousand times before they had come down these same stairs, but never on such a mission. Characteristically they refrained now from any discussion of their danger. No advance plan of action was practical. Their conduct would suit the events as they arose.

One or the other of them might come back alive; perhaps neither. Only yesterday Tony Zelig had been breathing and walking about; to-day he reposed in a silver casket that had cost fifteen thousand dollars. Death was like that; it was something that might grab anybody.

Joe felt a curious elation coming over him. The blood in his veins was flowing with a higher rhythm than usual; his step was elastic, his body erect. Ed Fontella at his side moved with a steady trudging step. They passed a policeman on post they both knew well, and all three spoke cordially.

The winter sun had come out, and the air was almost warm, redolent with the smells of the street and the shops. A young mother passed, pushing a baby in a carriage. Between the curbs a bunch of kids were dodging trucks and motor cars while they played with a rubber ball. But none of this mattered—this life that went on unceasingly all around would never miss Joe Leander or Ed Fontella. No, nor Horse McGuire either.

Yet life cannot be ignored, because life in itself has its own authority to interpose its humors into the plans of men.

There was, apparently, no earthly reason why Joe and Ed should not proceed directly and immediately to the lair of Horse McGuire. It was a simple design and easy of accomplishment.

But fate—if one believes in such things—had another notion. Three detectives from headquarters were cruising the district on the off chance of picking up a bit of information that might lead to the solution of the Zelig murder.

Now, the truth is that the police are very well satisfied to have gang leaders destroy one another. It is a good riddance of bad rubbish. Nevertheless, the public demands the formality of police investigation, and the officers of the law obligingly go through the motions.

They are fully aware from long experience that they need expect no help from the gangsters themselves. Later, the very men they question so fruitlessly will settle the outstanding obligation.

This is fact, not theory. Still the three cruising detectives, encountering Joe Leander and Ed Fontella, both well-known members of the Zelig mob, thought it opportune to halt them.

"Why, hello, boys," they said, not without cordiality. "We've been looking for you two fellows, and it's lucky all around that we met, now, ain't it?"

Sometimes suspected men, under such circumstances, are taken to headquarters, but quite as often even that formality is dispensed with. As it happened, there was, conveniently at hand, a speak-easy.

"We want to have a little chat with you two boys," said Detective Sergeant Ryan. "They tell me that the guy in this place handles some good beer; suppose we all go in and have a

mug together? Maybe you can tell us who killed Tony Zelig?"

IT was a courteous invitation, yet there was iron force behind it. Joe and Ed dared not resist or object. For one thing, they were both armed, and an arrest very easily might have meant a penitentiary sentence for violation of the Sullivan Law with regard to concealed weapons. Furthermore, any objection certainly would have landed them in the Tombs for at least twenty-four hours, whereas, by diplomacy, there was a chance of speedily disengaging themselves from the velvet clutch of the law.

For thirty minutes the two gangsters and the three policemen talked pleasantly and pointlessly about the Zelig murder. Neither Joe nor Ed knew anything about it, so they said. They lied, and the police knew they lied, but the officers were enabled to report that they were active on the case.

When the meeting broke up, Joe's face was blanched. He realized sinkingly that Eleanor Giddings must have arrived at Horse McGuire's place some minutes ago.

Once more they resumed their interrupted march upon McGuire's stronghold. A squat dog, a dark-jowled bulldog with short bench legs—that was Ed Fontella shouldering his way along beside the tense, drawn figure of Joe Leander.

"That frail you got on your mind," said Ed, "might be the cat's, but I can't stop thinkin' you're off on a bum steer wit' her."

"Will you shut up?" snapped Joe.

But the established privilege of an old friend led Ed to ignore the protest. "A lot of guys can take care of themselves as long as they're dealing with men," he went on, "but they get nutty when it comes to a skirt. You ain't never seen me gettin' that way over no woman."

"Don't be a fool," Joe said. "No woman ever started this business."

"Alla same, I'd like to see you tied up to some moll that is your kind," Ed persisted. "I mean, if you really gotta fall. No society dame is goin' to make you happy, kid. It ain't natural. Your girl oughta be real."

Fontella lapsed into silence, but his words had set up a queer strain of thought in Joe's mind. As in a vision, he saw himself married to the black-bobbed little show girl, Helen Reed.

It was a fancy that crept into his imagination—a speculation that, for a moment, drugged the deep-bedded pain that was rooted in the unhappiness of losing Eleanor Giddings. Losing her! Joe grinned bitterly to himself. He had never possessed her; there never had been a chance.

Funny; when a guy could have a thing, he didn't want it. Something had to be hard to get, to be worth while.

At that, Helen Reed was superior, barring Eleanor, to any girl he had ever known. She had brains, she was wise, she was on the up-and-up. Further, she was crazy about him. There was no egotism in this realization. Joe had sense enough to know that Helen Reed had fallen for him. She had glamour, too. Her stage career was going to get her somewhere, yet she was really the domestic type. She'd make any man a wonderful wife; would stick to him through thick and thin. She'd know how to keep a home. And that pep she had—that personality—would make any man proud of her. But it was nutty for him to be thinking things like that!

The only girl on earth that held the faintest spark of interest or affection for Joe Leander was the girl engaged to somebody else. Eleanor was as unattainable, and as remote, as the stars.

THE only thing left to do was to keep moving along with Ed Fontella until they reached Horse McGuire's place. Lee Martin, when he married Eleanor, could prove his love with the devotion of a lifetime. But the only way Joe could express what he felt was with the rough stuff. His only service to her would be through violence.

He had to stop Horse McGuire—to slug him or kill him, it didn't matter which. He would be required to perform some deed that in itself would be abhorrent to Eleanor. It was all he knew to do; his mind could carry him no further.

Ed touched him on the arm. "Snap out of it, kid! You're getting a goofy look like you was in a trance. Wake up—we're here!"

They were now, at last, outside McGuire's restaurant. There would be no customers inside at this afternoon hour; not until dinner and from then on until early morning would the joint be thoroughly alive. A few habitués, perhaps, might be gathered around a rear table, but even that possibility was not certain. During the day gangland sleeps, as a rule. Most likely, there would be no one about downstairs except a porter or two.

Upstairs in the gambling rooms it would be different. McGuire and his bodyguard, it was a ten to one bet, would be still on hand. Joe had already punished them severely to-day; very probably they would be secluded in their den like wounded animals. And as dangerous, because it was their pride and prestige that had suffered the hurts of defeat.

Careful planning had been neglected. The shrewd leadership of Tony Zelig never would have countenanced this blind attack that had shaped itself in Joe Leander's mind. It was, in a manner of speaking, suicidal. No sane gangster would deliberately stroll up to an enemy in ambush.

Yet Ed Fontella and Joe Leander, obsessed by their emotions, did exactly that.

The gods of battle were, temporaily, on their side. The two men stood peering through the plate glass front of the place for a moment and then moved toward the door.

Fontella turned up his coat collar precisely as though he were going to step into rain. Joe's movements were shrouded in bitter silence.

For a matter of two or three minutes the restaurant was attended only by a single waiter busy filling sugar bowls. The invaders walked straight up to him. Luck continued on their side—he was a new man engaged but this morning and he recognized neither.

"Where's McGuire?" demanded Fontella.

This was bad strategy; he should have left the initiative to Joe, his natural leader. It was sloppy work; Tony Zelig, had he been alive, would have been disgusted.

"You mean de boss?" the waiter responded dumbly.

"That's what I said!" Fontella snarled.

THE man shrugged. Perhaps in his ignorance he thought these two were tradesmen. He was exceptionally stupid.

"I dunno," he said negligently. "I just come on job to-day."

Fontella's face grew dangerous; he clenched a thick fist, but Joe caught his arm.

"Oh, hell, Ed, we're wasting time with this sap. C'mon!"

For the second time since dawn Joe went through the inner door in a side wall that gave upon the narrow hall and stairway that led to the dangers of the second floor. At his heels plugged the gnarled comrade of his venture. The air, as they went upstairs, was stale; a yellow electric bulb on a cord lit their way into the upper hall. Still in the lead, Joe moved to the door of McGuire's room. His automatic was now out of its holster and in his hand. Ed Fontella, too, carried his weapon visibly, held it at the most convenient level for instantaneous shooting.

The time, the inclination for caution had passed.

"Kick her open, Ed!"

Fontella's heavy foot crashed against the flimsy door and the rattletrap lock and hasp gave way.

A man with a white face sprang to his feet; he had been reading a newspaper. It was Billy the Goat. The paper dropped to the floor and his hands involuntarily rose above his head.

"Good God, don't shoot!" he bleated.

His eyes seemed to bulge; there was no doubt in his mind that Joe Lander had come back to kill him. In another instant he would have been groveling on the floor from sheer cowardice; yet he was one of the men who had sprayed Tony Zelig with lead.

"Keep your head, fella," Joe rasped out. "Maybe we'll let you live. Where's McGuire?"

Billy the Goat had trouble with his voice. "He—he ain't here," he explained with a squeak.

"Lee Martin started down here. Where is he? Is he with McGuire?"

The prisoner nodded. "Dey went away together; McGuire went with Martin."

"Where to?"

Billy the Goat tried to speak; sincerely he gulped and struggled in his throat, but the only sound was an incoherent jumble. Then, suddenly, he collapsed in a chair, his ghastly face buried in his hands.

"The dirty rat!" breathed Ed Fontella. "He's goin' to die from panic, right in front of us!"

Joe's eyes widened in surprise. The terror of Billy the Goat was unnatural, even in the face of armed enemies.

"Get yourself together, Goat!" he cried sharply. "All we want from you is information. You're not going to get hurt."

The man lifted his haggard countenance; slowly he got up on his trembling legs.

"GIMME a break, Leander!" he pleaded desperately. "I swear I didn't do it. McGuire done it himself. He made me stay here to—to watch the body."

Joe Leander sprang forward, seized the throat of Billy the Goat and held up his sagging body.

"Did a girl come here?" he cried, his own voice torn apart with anguish. "Tell me quick before I blow you to hell!"

Billy the Goat was able, in his peril, only to wave an arm. He was gesturing toward a closed door.

"He means in there!" cried Fontella.

Even as he rushed toward the door Joe joined him, their captive dropping, forgotten, to the floor. A wrench at the knob brought the door open. It was a closet, and there was a grotesque,

blood-stained thing on the floor. A dead arm fell out stiffly.

It was the body of Lee Martin.

A stillness too awful for words gathered within the four walls. At last the dry sobbing of Billy the Goat broke the silence. He struggled up to a sitting posture, climbed into a chair. All strength, all menace, had evaporated from his slender, once dapper frame.

"He come here an' tried to argue with McGuire," he said, hysteria trembling through his voice. "He was half drunk, Martin was. Horse was kinda drunk too. They argued about money owin' McGuire, an' Horse pulled a gun an' shot him. I never moved a finger myself!"

Joe was so cold, so frozen in his heart, that he felt he would creak if he moved suddenly.

"Where's McGuire?" he demanded, still and frigid.

"He's gone to get a truck to take it away," came the shaky reply. "Nobody heard the shot. McGuire is gonna get a canvas to put over it, an' he's gonna make me help him carry it out."

"A girl started down here, after Martin started," pursued Joe slowly. "You gotta tell us about her too, Goat. No matter what it is, you gotta tell us everything. If you want to live you can't hold anything back."

Cringing, fawning, striving desperately to still his terror and make terms for his life, Billy the Goat gathered his shaking wits.

"I'll come clean wit' you, Mr. Leander," he pronounced. "One of the boys, a waiter, comes up from downtairs an' says there's a girl there wantin' to see Horse."

"Was this after he killed Martin?"

"After he killed Martin, yes," went on Billy the Goat. "Horse leaves me here wit' the body an' goes down to see the girl. What he does wit' her I don't know. He brings her upstairs, I know; I heard 'em."

"Where?"

"Out in the hall. Maybe he takes her in a back room on this floor an' has her wait—I dunno, I swear I don't. I just hear them out in the hall. I'm here wit' the body an' I don't pay much attention. McGuire stops in here a minute an' says he'll be back wit' the truck an' the canvas."

A MAN'S feet sounded on the stairs. The speech of Billy the Goat ceased as though he had been throttled. Like motionless statues, the three men in the death room waited for the fourth to enter.

Horse McGuire entered.

Before their eyes they saw all confidence drain away from his bony equine features. It was as though bone and flesh remained of his face, but no blood. A premonition, swift and certain, told him he would never leave the room alive. He who had dealt death so freely to others felt its chill seep into the marrow of his own bones. No criminal, certainly no killer, is quite normal; and now Horse McGuire was charged with the fumes of strong liquor. He managed to hang onto the last shreds of his old bluff.

"What do you guys mean comin' in here?" he demanded vigorously.

But the effort at bold speech consumed the last of his bravado. All at once he started to tremble violently.

"McGuire, I'm gonna kill you!" said Ed Fontella suddenly, raising his weapon. "Get ready!"

But Joe, with swift impatience, brushed Fontella's aim aside.

"Not yet, Ed!" he cried. "Where's the girl, McGuire?"

The slayer of Lee Martin grasped

at his last straw. His dry tongue sought in vain to moisten his dry lips.

"She—she spoke about you, Leander," he croaked. "I got the idea she was more worried about you than she was about Martin. I—I can make a deal wit' you, Leander. If you kill me, maybe something terrible would happen to her. She's waitin' in a place I put her an' if somebody like Kid Blood was to find her—you know what would happen to her."

Joe was rigid. Never in his life had he been forced to exercise such self-control.

"Get me that girl and I won't murder you," he stated, each word like a chunk of ice. "If you don't, you'll never live another hour."

Horse McGuire's lips hung open.

"She's waitin' in the last room down the hall," he said slowly. "The key's hangin' on a nail outside the door. I never harmed her none—I just told her that she could wait there an' talk to Martin when he got here. I doubt if she knows I locked her in."

"Guard them!" Joe snapped to Ed Fontella. "If they try anything, let 'em have it."

HE closed the door behind him as he left the room. Thirty seconds later he was in a shabby bedroom where Eleanor Giddings, her face a masque of anguish, sat in a rocker by a window. When she looked at him her eyes were pools of infinite sadness. There were no preliminaries of speech.

"I heard a shot fired when I came in," she said hollowly. "At first I thought it was you."

"I've got to get you out of here right now," Joe said quietly. "We'll get a taxi."

Her gaze was fixed on his face; her speech remained trancelike, as a person who, being awake, dreams with perfect clarity.

"I thought you might have been killed, but then I knew that it was somebody else," she said, not moving. "I don't know how or why I knew—but I was certain it was not you. It was Lee Martin, wasn't it?"

Joe Leander looked at her steadily and saw that she could endure the truth.

"Yes," he said.

"I'll break down later," she voiced, "but not now. Lee Martin wasn't able to cope with life. You—even though you never had a chance—you were always stronger than Lee."

"I've got to get you out of here," Joe urged.

"In a moment," she responded gravely. "When this is all over will you come some time and see me?"

"I'll do anything you ask. Any time," he said solemnly.

"Then—oh, Joe, change your life. Get away from all this. You can do it. Where Lee Martin was weak you can be strong. I'll go now."

Swiftly he got her into a taxicab.

"We have been through a terrible thing together," she said at last. "I can't think it all out—but the end is not yet."

When she was gone, Joe Leander had a curious feeling that he, too, would soon be bidding farewell forever to New York. He would have to get away—to start really to build a newer, finer decency than he had ever before visioned. Somewhere in the West, perhaps.

Then he performed the most amazing act ever known in the history of gang warfare. He called a policeman to arrest a murderer.

THE END.

Lightning-fast, he fired at the observer.

Below the Surface

Deep in the waters of the Irish Sea, with destroyers hunting like wolves for their prey, the German U-boat cruised—with Blaise Ryan, U. S. N., as one of her crew

By W. ADOLPHE ROBERTS

HER hull vibrating rhythmically to the pounding of engines that were relatively enormous but in none too good condition, the U-920 plowed through the sub-surface waters of the Irish Sea. There had been a winter storm the day before and the ocean was still agitated. The boat wallowed with a peculiar slipping motion, as though it intended to roll completely over with each lurch, but never quite achieved that horror. The sensation of instability which resulted would have made even the most hardened mariner seasick, if he had not had previous submarine experience.

A red-haired sailor in German uniform sat on the edge of his bunk in the cramped forecastle and chewed a plug of tobacco, because it was forbidden to smoke when the craft was submerged. His face wore a stolid expression, but his alert eyes were turned toward the open doorway that led directly into the main central saloon.

The only man he could see was the lookout on duty at the periscope, which was located in a small alcove off the saloon. Plainly, however, he was listening to the low, guttural conversation of several Prussian officers, hidden from view by the steel wall to the right

of the door. They were sitting around a table where they had been playing cards, but had dropped the game and were now discussing the terrible effect of the depth-bombs which the United States Navy had started to use against the U-boats.

Inside the forecastle, the red-haired sailor had four companions who, like himself, were off duty for that watch. All of them were asleep, sprawled in their bunks; but by a curious coincidence, which proved important later, their beds were in each case attached to the end wall of the cabin. They, too, had they been awake, would have been able to see the man at the periscope, but were invisible to the seated officers. The bunks against the side walls were empty.

The voice of Lieutenant Max von Steinert, commander of the U-920, swelled now on a harsher, louder note, as he proclaimed, evidently in rebuttal to the claim of some younger officer:

"I tell you, we must look only at facts! Gentlemen, we have not been able to devise any protection against the Yankee depth-bombs. The cursed things can be timed to explode at any number of feet below the surface. The concussion spreads in waves. Submarines which have had the bad luck to be close by are literally torn apart. Those a little farther away are so damaged that they sink to the bottom. Even at a considerable distance, the limits of which are yet undetermined, our delicate engines receive injuries which force us to the surface, where we are no match for gunboats and destroyers."

The red-haired sailor was listening carefully. His keen blue eyes were aglisten with interest. He heard the heavy voice of Under-Lieutenant Schmelzer: "But at least our listening apparatus enables us to signal the approach of the egg-laying craft. We can give them a wide berth."

"A fine argument!" sneered Von Steinert. "Can we conduct a war by keeping away from the enemy? It is required of us to torpedo transports and merchant vessels, which are always convoyed nowadays. We must also sink all the destroyers possible. A few weeks ago we were on the point of gaining control of the seas. Then the depth-bombs are sprung on us, and sooner or later we'll be ruined. *Gott strafe* the Yankees!"

A TWINKLE appeared in the blue eyes of the red-haired sailor. His heart thumped joyously. For despite the fact that he was a regularly accredited member of the U-920's crew, on whose rolls he figured as Heinrich Franzen, conscript seaman from a Mecklenburg coast village, his real name was Blaise Ryan, and his status that of a gunner's mate, first class, in the United States Navy.

Two months previously, he had been summoned before Captain Hugh Winthrop, in charge of the temporary U. S. N. Intelligence Office at Cork. The captain had looked him over piercingly for what seemed several minutes, and then spoke crisply:

"Ryan, I am informed that you were in the Irish revolutionary movement before we entered the war. It is said that you made trips to Hamburg and smuggled arms and munitions back to Ireland, on at least one occasion, in a German submarine. Is that true?"

"Yes, sir, it is," Blaise Ryan had answered, flushing darkly. "But if that's going to be held against me—"

"Nothing of the kind!" Captain

Winthrop had interrupted. "What you chose to do as an Irishman while the U. S. A. was neutral is immaterial to me. Your record with us is straight. You were in New York in 1917, and you enlisted in the Navy the very day we declared war. What I want to know, Ryan, is your present opinion of Germany."

"A damned poor opinion, sir. She never was on the square with Ireland. I can't stomach the sinking of unarmed passenger vessels. And—but what's the use of talking? I've taken the oath to fight Germany from hell to breakfast, haven't I?"

Winthrop nodded. "It's on your enlistment papers you know German. Does that mean a smattering of it?"

A look of satisfaction had replaced the half-sullen expression in Ryan's eyes. "Not so's you could notice it, sir! There's a lot I don't know, I guess. But I know German all right. I can speak it. I don't mean the way the doughboys speak French, sir; I can speak it like a regular Heinie."

"Good. I'm going to offer you a stiff assignment. I'm not ordering you to do it, but I hope you'll volunteer. We want you to make another trip to Hamburg. Worm your way, if possible, into the submarine service there. You can pass yourself off as being still an Irish agent, if that's the best you can do. But I'd prefer to have you go entirely German. Steal some Jerry's papers, and get onto a U-boat. I want a report on what moral, as well as physical, damage the depth-bomb is doing to them, and what steps they are taking to combat it. Is that clear?"

"It's very clear, sir, that a man sent on a mission of that kind doesn't have one chance in a hundred of coming out of it alive—and would be shot as a spy if caught."

"Perfectly true. But war is hell, you know. I'm sending quite a number of men and if you don't return some of the others may. It means a great deal to our country—but of course, Ryan, if you doubt your own courage, say so," he sneered.

Ryan had drawn himself up as if he had been struck. "I ask the privilege of volunteering for this service, sir," he had growled fiercely.

Captain Hugh Winthrop smiled. His knowledge of the fighting psychology of the Irish had been gained through long years since he had graduated from Annapolis. "I felt sure I could depend on you, Ryan. The fact that you have already been in Hamburg under war conditions makes you especially valuable. I'll arrange right away for a couple of days shore leave for you. After that, you'll receive sealed orders from this office, and it will be up to you to make good on your own."

THE work had become a sacred trust to Blaise Ryan. He had reached Germany in a Norwegian fishing smack, which, like many others under neutral flags, was a smuggler of foodstuffs and men. In Hamburg he had scraped acquaintanceship with several naval conscripts. Often they were a hard-drinking sometimes sullen bunch, and Blaise found it easy to credit the story that these men were not infrequently forced aboard sea-going U-boats at revolver-point.

Many, when sufficiently drunk, confided a desire to desert. But one particular conscript, Heinrich Franzen, had proved a real find. He had the blazing red hair often found in natives of the Mecklenburg duchy. He had an eternally unslacked thirst for strong drink. As he studied the man's provincial accent and sometimes imi-

tated it, Ryan was noticing with interest the conscript's build. His height and weight were about the same as his own, though the Mecklenburger was bulkier.

Franzen had been willing to take any chances to desert. Ryan had bought his papers, and had given him in exchange a false passport with which the German hoped to make his way to Denmark. Ryan had then waited until the submarine on which Franzen had been serving had put to sea. He had then reported to the base, with a carefully rehearsed story of an accident in a waterfront café.

The story had been only partly believed—just what Ryan had expected. His drink-bleared eyes had shown none of the joy that he felt when he saw that, in their suspicion, that here was a drink-craving seaman telling a lame story, the German officials never suspected that he was not Heinrich Franzen, the Mecklenburger with the blazing red hair. Ryan's three days in the guard house were a period of boredom but also of optimism. That he had passed as the real Franzen seemed certain.

But his worries did not cease until he was assigned to another U-boat, the 920, and in due course he left port on a cruise which admittedly had as its object the maximum ruthless destruction of allied shipping. Once at sea, Ryan's heart leaped at the thought that here, among officers and men who did not know Heinrich Franzen, he was sitting pretty. That more than one-third of the German U-boats never returned to port at this period never worried him. He had achieved the first and most difficult lap of his dangerous quest.

Ryan now sat on the edge of his bunk and listened eagerly for further talk among the German officers concerning the threatened failure of undersea warfare. It was not the first time that he had done this. He had gathered an invaluable budget of information which he kept imprinted in his brain, for he did not dare to make written notes. The candor of Lieutenant Von Steinert and his staff, supposedly remote from alien ears, and, accordingly, garrulously frank, had left nothing to be desired. Unconscious of the fact that this particular period of eavesdropping was to be made unique by a monstrous interruption, Ryan continued to listen.

"The war, after all, will have to be won on land," Von Steinert was saying. "Ludendorf must smash the Western front, and—"

The voice of the man at the periscope caused Von Steinert to clip his sentence. Ryan heard the nasal drone:

"Fog lifting to starboard reveals vessel of about twelve thousand tons eastward bound. Her hull is painted with zigzag bands of many colors—the new American war camouflage. She steers a course that will bring her into torpedo range within ten minutes."

An instant of dead silence was followed by excited chattering on the part of the officers. Von Steinert's bellow took preference.

"Is there any convoy?" he demanded.

"No other vessels are in sight. She would seem to have become isolated in the fog and is steaming full speed, as if to regain a lost position," the periscope observer chanted.

"Can you see troops aboard?"

"No, the distance is too great. In a minute, perhaps. Yes, I now distinguish men lined up at the rails on all decks. She is a military transport—undoubtedly American. She cor-

responds in type to the boats being built at the Hog Island yards."

RYAN could hear Von Steinert snatch a telephone receiver from its hook, and in a moment he was in communication with the torpedo room. The snapping order sent a queer, dismal feeling surging through Blaise Ryan: "Stand ready to sink enemy craft!"

The observer was calling out a succession of intricate figures, denoting distance, the speed maintained by the transport and the fractional variations of her course. Under-Lieutenant Schmelzer had already picked up a second telephone and was transmitting orders to the engine room. The competing voices produced a veritable bedlam, which became frenzied as the observer reported that the transport was no longer steaming straight ahead, but had started to tack. This did not necessarily mean that her suspicions had been aroused. The maneuver was commonly practiced on general principles. But it rendered the problem more complicated for the U-920.

Ryan had not stirred from his place on the edge of the bunk. But his whole body was tense. His eyes were like points of blue flame. His heart banged away like a thumping engine. His body fairly vibrated with excitement. His brain was flashing thoughts to him like a crackling antenna. He glanced stealthily at his companions.

The clamor had stirred them from their sleep. They had pulled themselves up on their elbows and listened. But they quickly slumped back on to their faces. They seemed brutishly indifferent to what was going on. A torpedoing was no novelty to them, and since they were off duty, they saw no reason why they should mix in the matter, at least until commanded to do so.

The American ground his teeth soundlessly and stared once more through the open doorway at the man at the periscope.

"Enemy craft now well within torpedo range. Soldiers aboard are plainly American. She cuts across our bows on a northeasterly tack, the distance being—" the observer was crying shrilly.

Von Steinert bawled into his telephone: "All ready now to discharge torpedo from left tube, when I give the signal. Correct your range to—"

The order was never completed, for its climax was brusquely ruined by an astonishing act on the part of Baise Ryan. His hand flew to his inner breast pocket, out of which he whipped a revolver of the type furnished to German naval officers, but which the common seamen were not supposed to carry. Without taking apparent aim, but lightning fast, he fired twice into the alcove where the periscope observer sat. The man's chanting voice choked into a guttural gurgle. The observer slumped to the floor. The second bullet was seen to have smashed the finding-glass of the delicate instrument.

His fingers had no sooner finished pressing the trigger than Ryan hurled his revolver straight downward into a basket of soiled clothes, which stood in the middle of the forecastle floor. He then silently swung up his legs and rolled over with a continuing motion that brought his entire body into the berth. His hand passed through his hair, effectively mussing it as though he had been asleep. The uproar which broke loose in the forecastle and saloon alike found him making a showing of innocence and surprise, which differed

not a whit from that of his cabin-mates.

VON STEINERT was in the doorway, cursing with a violence that knew no limits. His face was purple, and his congested neck was straining at his collar-band. He saw in front of him five men, all leaning from their berths, and all stammering incoherent questions. They looked like men who had been simultaneously jolted awake by the fatal detonations. Yet the commander knew, beyond the shadow or reasonable doubt, that one of them had committed the unheard-of offense of blinding the eyes of his U-boat at the instant when it had been about to make the kill.

"Who fired those shots?" Von Steinert screamed. "I order you to denounce the traitor!"

The five, including Ryan, stared from one to the other, as if hypnotized. The four Germans were honestly in a state of complete bewilderment. Each felt that it might have been any one of the rest. At the same time, they found it incredible that such a deed should have been deliberately committed. In a sort of panic, they took refuge in the thought that a wild bullet from the outer world must have pierced the shell of the submarine and struck down the periscope man. They started to chorus a babbled expression of this idea.

The stupidity of the theory drove Von Steinert almost insane with wrath. His keen eye had detected the revolver in the basket of soiled clothes. He retrieved the weapon, broke it and observed the two exploded shells. Then, howling with redoubled fury, he ordered the five sailors to be shackled and brought before him in the saloon for a drumhead court-martial.

It had been established by this time that the periscope man, though seriously wounded in the chest, would probably recover from his injuries.

"This is either the case of a plot among you all, or it is an attempted murder planned, God knows why, by a single criminal lunatic and traitor," said Von Steinert, after the stage had been set for the semi-formal proceedings. "If it is not a plot, I offer any of you immunity in the event of his bearing witness against the rest. But I think it is a one-man crime, and it should be easy to get at the bottom of that. The innocent men will be able to help me detect the lies of the guilty. Now, I shall question you one by one."

At the end of a quarter of an hour, he had heard substantially the same story from five different mouths. All the sailors swore that they were innocent, and that they had no reason to suspect a comrade. All vowed that they knew nothing about the revolver, which did not belong to any of the officers, and had evidently been smuggled aboard at Hamburg.

"I suppose you fools think that I will let the lot of you off if I can't find out who pulled that trigger," stormed Von Steinert. "Instead, I declare you all to be guilty. I sentence you all to be shot! We are in the war zone, and we cannot rise to the surface to make use of the deck. So the executions will take place against the far wall in this room. Unterleutnant Schmelzer! You will form a firing squad at once and be prepared to carry out the sentence at the word of command!"

RYAN felt himself being thrust backward and ranged in position at the right end of the line. He resisted the impulse to wet his lips. He fought down other manifestations

of nervousness which might have attracted notice. Mechanically, he joined in the general protestations against the fate that was being meted out. His brain was functioning with diamond clarity. He thought to himself: "It is unbelievable that Von Steinert will have five men shot. This boat is short-handed now, and he can't spare us. One man—yes; but not five. His bluff will break down somehow."

But Von Steinert sat at his table with an inflexible expression on his face as the riflemen lined up. Under-Lieutenant Schmelzer was buckling on his sword, that even this unusual duty might be carried out with the impressiveness of German militarism. His heavy face showed no emotion. He crossed to the side of his firing squad and his hand went to his sword-hilt. Then Von Steinert held up his right hand in an arresting gesture, and leaned across the table. He glared at the five men in the shadow of death.

"One more chance," he said, savagely biting off his words. "The Fatherland needs those of you who are innocent. If the guilty man will step forward now, he will save four innocent lives."

He paused. There was a tense silence broken only by the drumming of the boat's engines. "*Ach!* It is not enough!" The tone was sneering. "The guilty man is concerned only with his own filthy hide. Very well! If the guilty man will step forward now, I will suspend sentence of death—yes, even on him! He will merely be put in irons, to be delivered over to the Admiralty Court at home. I will even recommend life imprisonment instead of the extreme penalty, since it seems that his victim is not going to succumb."

Ryan's heart bounded. Instinctively, he felt relief, a new courage, at the simple mention of a possible reprieve. Yet he knew that in no circumstances could he confess to having shot the periscope observer. He, Ryan, was a secret agent fulfilling a mission for the United States Navy, and it would be a gross betrayal of duty for him to reveal his identity now. The first law of the service required him to cling to his disguise, even at the cost of his life. If the enemy succeeds in unmasking a spy, nothing can be done about it. But the latter may never voluntarily confess and thereby show up the system he has been following.

The German lieutenant was glaring at the five faces in front of him. On each face was the realization of impending doom. The eyes looked straight ahead; in them hope had died. The mouths remained grimly shut.

"If you fail to realize my generosity, you are dumb oxen!" snarled Von Steinert. "The criminal did more than avenge some private grudge, whatever his intention. His bullets prevented us from striking a great blow for Germany, from torpedoing an American ship on which there were thousands of soldiers—soldiers who are bringing death to our brothers, our comrades. Yet I offer him his life, if he will clear the names of his innocent shipmates. *Gott in himmel,* can I do more?"

The four sailors who stood in line with Ryan commenced to whimper. Their nerves were worn raw by the terror of the situation. In order not to seem conspicuous, it was forced upon the American to moan weakly, too. A bystander would have sworn that none of them was guilty.

Von Steinert let his hand fall in futile rage on the table. Ryan read determination in that set face, smudged with a blob of oil. He knew that he had

read aright when the commander got impatiently to his feet, oversetting his stool.

"The execution will proceed!" he roared.

BY means of prodding from the butts of rifles, the line of condemned men was braced, shoulder to shoulder, against the wall of the saloon. As Ryan's back touched the metal partition, he became more keenly aware of the vibration and seal-like rolling of the submarine. It was a grotesque thing to be shot to death in this way he mused grimly. Blaise Ryan, U. S. N., being shot to death as a Heinie in an *untersee* boat. But many strange things would happen before this man's war would be over. He saw Under-Lieutenant Schmelzer signal to his firing squad. In a moment, perhaps, certainly in two, the war would be over for Blaise Ryan.

He looked into the sinister eye of the rifle directly in front of him—there were five riflemen, one executioner to each prisoner.

"I shall count, one— two— three!" said Von Steinert. "The instant I have uttered the word 'Three,' the *unterleutnant* will give the order to fire. Up to the last, a confession will be accepted. My promise to the guilty man, remember, is the promise of a gentleman—a German officer. And now to business. Ready, Unterleutnant Schmelzer! I count! One!"

There was no word from the line of doomed men, but an accused sailor in the middle of the line, a Leipziger named Braun, let out an explosive, whimpering sob. For just a fraction of an instant, Ryan's straight blue eyes turned from that eerie eye of death in front of him and his glance rested on Braun. The Leipzig man was shaking like a bowl of jelly. He was tall, but his eye-line was below Ryan's line of vision. The man's knees were almost buckling.

"*Two!*"

Silence, more dreadful than cries of despair. Just the suspicion of a suppressed sniffle from Braun. The rhythmic pounding of the engines.

Seconds to go—and then— eternity. Seconds—but they dragged out. The commander's mouth was open to pronounce the fatal "Three!" Under-Lieutenant Schmelzer's hand was curved on his sword-hilt. A whistle escaping from the clenched teeth of Braun, the seaman from Leipzig—a whistle that ended in a wail. And then:

"I did it!" the innocent Braun gasped, and stepped forward, his hands outstretched.

A seaman in the line who had faced death with wooden countenance, now opened his mouth in a wail and poured forth incoherent words, as once more he faced life.

"You!" Von Steinert yelled. "You, Braun! *Donnerwetter!* I would never have thought it! Never!"

As if unable to articulate another syllable, the sailor Braun collapsed on the floor. Ryan passed his hand slowly across his forehead, as if to wipe away a fog. He had never been and never would be—never could be—nearer, or indeed as near, to death.

Ryan now took his cue from the three men beside him who had been snatched from doom, and acted like them, muttered the same phrases. But his active mind was trying to plumb the mystery of the past minute or two. Braun! A good enough fellow, a conscript, at heart a man of peace. Braun! Perhaps with a mother or wife or child or flaxen-haired sweetheart back in Leipzig—innocent as a babe, but since

the guilty man held back, Braun had taken the crime upon himself to save the lives of all, or at any rate, to save his own life for the present, at least. Yes! That was it! Ryan felt sure of it. It could be the only solution. Braun had thought it better to face jail than certain death.

And now, he, Blaise Ryan, was alive. He had not feared death. But now he was alive! Alive! The tension in the saloon had snapped. He could see the sweat-beads on the faces of the riflemen who, but for Braun's last-minute "confession," would have been executioners of their comrades. He could hear the voice of Von Steinert: "Put this murderer Braun in irons." And then: "You other four men may return to your duties. You are brave sons of the Fatherland. May you live long to win her battles."

He could still hear Von Steinert's rumbling voice as he broke ranks: "As to the splintered periscope—you, Hazenpflug, will see that—"

THEN Blaise Ryan, making his way back to his bunk, was abruptly flung flat on his face in the midst of a mess of dirty clothes. His head roared from the force of an explosion, and almost immediately the submersible had become as dark as the inside of a sewer. The concussion had thrown other men down, and now he could hear them scrambling to their feet. He got to his own feet, and was almost knocked down again by some one brushing by him in the darkness. He recognized Von Steinert's voice in a bawled command, and a moment later the lights of three candles showed as ghastly yellow arrows. The floor of the craft was tilted at an angle of sixty degrees, and Blaise Ryan suddenly discovered that his feet were wet.

For once, the strict discipline aboard the U-920 crumbled, for the greenest man in the ship's company was only too well aware of what had happened. Some enemy craft on the surface had picked out the wash of the periscope or had guessed the U-boat's approximate location by means of a sound-detector, and had dropped a depth-bomb. It had "let go" some little distance away from the submerged boat. But there might be another!

There was a new note in Von Steinert's voice as he shouted commands. Blaise Ryan leaped to his post as eagerly as any German sailor aboard, making common cause with the Heinies.

Quite possibly he and every man aboard the U-920 were already doomed. Another depth-bomb, and Blaise Ryan would be missing forever. And missing, too, would be that valuable budget of information that any Allied sea-lord would give half his stripes to get.

The pumps had been badly affected, that much was certain. They were making a miserable job of blowing out the ballast tanks. He could hear the chief engineer officer in excited conversation with Von Steinert. But more informative still, the boat was nosing down at a more acute angle.

Additional candles were brought. Their flames burned wanly and punily. Von Steinert's command was a screech. "We must get to the surface! There is sea-water in the accumulators!"

Every man knew what that meant. It meant sure death by chlorine gas. There was a crackling sound next to Blaise Ryan. The seaman in front of him—one of the five men originally condemned—crumbled to the flooded floor. In the bad light, Blaise could see no wound, but he saw a revolver splash

to the floor. He guessed that the panicky seaman had grabbed the revolver from Von Steinert's little table and shot himself. He had braved impending death by rifle-fire, but this new horror he could not stand. The eyes of the prostrate dead man stared up weirdly. The loose mouth was gaping. The body was gliding slowly, eerily forward.

Strong men, sweat rolling down their oily faces, were trying futilely to force the hatches. Even Schmelzer, his impressive sword now laid by, was performing hard manual labor, possibly for the first time in his life. He was swinging a sledge hammer toward some point not visible to Ryan in the gloom, evidently trying to force some possibility of escape through the conning-tower.

Blaise Ryan sloshed aft for another sledge, got it, half ran, half slipped, back with it. The men were still battering away at the hatches. Ryan knew that the pressure from without was terrific; that trying to force the hatches would be like trying to bite through armor-plate. But he took up his stance, and hammered away. Doing something might keep a man from going crazy—and that was about all. He could feel a slight chokiness in his throat. That sea water in the accumulators was starting to add its strength to the forces of death already present.

THE electric lights went on—winked off again—then flashed on again and stayed on. One sign of hope. That engineer-officer knew his stuff. And Ryan could hear the gaspy, labored action of the pumps. The ship was slowly righting. Men were torn from their fruitless labor at the hatches and herded aft. Even this infinitesimal weight might help matters, might pull up the nosed-down bow. The U-boat reared its head gradually, painfully. Water trickled back toward the stern. The pumps sounded more confident.

A depth-bomb any place near the wounded steel shark would mean calamity now. A forced plate would mean a great inrush of water, increased pressure against the hatches. It would accomplish what mere man could not accomplish; it would tear open the hatches like the cover of an egg-grate ripped with a hammer. There was no talk now. Eternity might come at any second to put a period to a sentence.

Rank evaporated. The firing squad men stood shoulder to shoulder with the men they would have executed. Ryan noticed Braun, the shackling of whom had been interrupted by the depth-bomb, standing there glumly. Braun now had as good a chance as any one.

The ship was rising gradually to the surface. The men now started to gabble. The surface might mean capture, even death. But it was not so much death that mattered. It was the kind of death that mattered.

Blaise Ryan tried to picture what was happening above. Would the U-boat have time to surrender, if that was Von Steinert's intention? Or would it be stove in and sent to the bottom again by shell-fire the instant it poked its nose through the surface water? He assumed that the transport sighted before the periscope glass was shattered, must, after all, have seen the U-boat's trail. The lookout had reported her zigzagging. He had also reported the fog lifting to starboard.

Might not the transport have signaled or radioed, and brought some

black-hulled destroyer out of the fog? In that case, the destroyer was dropping ash-cans here and there, guessing at location. Lucky for him, Blaise Ryan, that they were only guessing. When would they get to that surface? The hectic actions in the hull of the U-920 had taken a surprisingly short time. But another ash-can ought to be due. Sometimes, on more or less of a blind trail, destroyers let minutes intervene between drops.

The clips that secured the lid of the conning-tower were released. Another second or two, now. And it was through his ears rather than his eyes that Blaise Ryan knew that they were once more awash, when Ryan heard the crash of shell-fire. The shell saved the German seamen the questionable trouble of opening the lid. The lid disappeared. A jagged column of steel remained.

Officers and men were piling out through the damaged opening. Blaise could hear and feel the impact of another hit, and then strident cries of "*Kamerad!*"

HE scrambled up the deck. Several seamen were already in the water. Before his eyes, two of them sank. The nose of the careening sea-canister was strangely missing. Perhaps a nautical mile away was a vessel, its sides daubed with a great rainbow of colors—bars and stripes and smudges of violent blues and greens and reds.

He had guessed what had happened It was obviously a transport, and unquestionably *the* transport. Standing by, a few hundred yards to port, was a destroyer, inky smoke bannering from her funnels. The destroyer had ceased shelling, and was bearing speedily toward the sinking submarine. There were, after all, navies that picked up enemy survivors.

Once in the water, he could see that several were doomed to die within sight of rescue—that last shell must have hit the bow and skittered along the deck. A seaman raised a bleeding stump of an arm, and turned to him for succor. Ryan's heart gave a tweak, but that man seemed doomed anyhow. He swam by him with his rugged overhand, for another seaman with a bad splinter wound in his head was floundering all but helplessly. Ryan could see the appealing, china-blue eyes turned toward him. The last time he had looked at those china-blue eyes they had the look of death in them.

"Steady, Braun!" he said in German. "Here. Don't grab me now—that's it! Just try to hold yourself up a little. I'll do the rest. You saved my life, you know."

And perhaps Braun never thought out the meaning of that cryptic statement.

Ten minutes later, on the deck of the U. S. Destroyer Elliott, Blaise Ryan counted seven men rescued. He stepped up to the two-and-a-half striped evidently in command.

"Sir," he said, "I have something special report to you. I'd like a word in private, if possible."

The lieutenant-commander's eyes bulged just a trifle. "Where did you learn English, Heinie?" he asked.

Blaise Ryan turned from the row of rescued men, and lowered his tone. "Aw, Heinie hell, captain!" he said. "Get me where I can talk to you private, and I'll spill you one of the biggest secret service stories of the war. And all it'll cost you is one Bull Durham cigarette."

THE END.

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

UNSIGNED, anonymous communications are un-American. No upright, straightforward man or woman hides behind a *nom de plume* while making an attack, or stoops to invective in an unsigned letter. Argonotes is a meeting-place for all ARGOSY readers and authors, but we feel that all who contribute to these columns should have the courage to sign their letters. Therefore, Argonotes will hereafter be closed to unsigned letters and all missives of this sort will be consigned to the waste basket unread.—THE EDITOR.

ANTARCTICA

AFTER finishing Ray Cummings's latest novel, "The Snow Girl," we again wondered just how impossible this "impossible" fiction really is. With Commander Byrd on the scene already and other expeditions preparing to explore the Antarctic wastes—would it be so impossible if the scenes depicted in Mr. Cummings's story soon are actuality? Who can say "no"?

For example read the following account, clipped from the June 29 issue of the Quebec *Chronicle-Telegraph*:

HIDDEN WEALTH SPURS STRUGGLE OVER ANTARCTICA

Sydney, Australia—The claims of the United States to regions in the Antarctic are, various newspapers assert here, dictated by the growing belief in Antarctic economic possibilities, so remarkably demonstrated by the financial success of the numerous Norwegian whaling enterprises.

Sir Douglas Mawson, who has been chosen by the Australian government to lead its expedition to Antarctica at the end of this year, has bluntly swept away any illusion that he is going merely in search of scientific honor and glory.

"Antarctica is not just a useless stretch of ice; it is like Alaska, from which the Americans have taken £800,000,000 in gold," he said.

This, following disputes regarding international boundaries at the "bottom of the world"—prompted, of course, by the belief that there are vast mineral deposits there—means that the numbers have gone up for a great treasure hunt.

The sudden access of interest in Antarctica suggests that some authoritative information regarding the economic value of the Far South has been received and, since iron and copper and such like metals are of vital importance, it is probable that all future interest in this vast territory will center on its economic rather than its scientific aspect.

Sir Douglas Mawson, it is stated by scientists here, has refrained from writing all that he knows of the Antarctic. It is suggested that he is in possession of evidence proving the Antarctic to be the storehouse of enormous mineral wealth.

If that is so, it is a fair assumption that the British government also knows—and it explains the sudden interest taken by the Australian government in Antarctic affairs.

And so—just how prophetic is "The Snow Girl"?

COMING

WE seldom use the columns of Argonotes to forecast coming issues, but the bill-of-fare for the next few issues is so excellent we know you will be interested in hearing about it.

H. Bedford-Jones, in the issue of November 16, with "Cyrano," a great "cloak and sword" novel of Richelieu's day.

Fred MacIsaac, in the issue of November 23, with a fine serial of crime and blackmail in New York.

Murray Leinster, in the issue of November 30 with "The Darkness on Fifth Avenue," the first of a series of the most unusual novelettes we ever have published.

Erle Stanley Gardner, Otis Adelbert Kline, Richard Barry, Hulbert Footner and a host of others following right after these!

That's all for now.

CORN

ONE of our readers makes a point of accuracy with Joseph Ivers Lawrence:

Taunton, Mass.

In "Swords On the North Sea," by J. I. Lawrence, in the issue of August 24, page 50, appears this sentence: "The Roman farms have meat and corn." Here Mr. Lawrence made a mistake, for corn is a gift to the Old World from the New. Columbus is said to have carried the first grains of corn to the New World, and the Indians taught him to plant and prepare it.

The variety of the ARGOSY is excellent lately. The fantastic, imaginative yarns furnish a change, "The Planet of Peril" being especially good. T. F. J. S., Jr.

AND Mr. Lawrence answers:

I am very glad to have an opportunity to clear up a point that has often caused confusion and misunderstanding.

Only to us in America does the word "corn" refer directly to the vegetable that we are all enjoying at this season and to the grain from which we produce good Rhode Island Johnny cake. Cross the ocean, and you must call our corn "maize," to make yourself understood. "Swords On the North Sea" was a story of England, and I used the word "corn" in the English sense, which is very nearly the universal sense.

The word comes from the German "Korn," which means a grain, of sand, gold, wheat, or almost anything.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following:

> "CORN.—A grain, seed, especially of cereals (also of pepper, &c.); also cereal plants while growing. (U. S.) maize, Indian corn."

In England the "corn merchant" is what we would call a grain dealer, and the several sacks of *corn* that a man buys for his horse turn out to be full of oats. The local uses of the word in Great Britain differ, so that when an English farmer refers to his corn field he usually means a field of wheat—the English staple, while a Scottish farmer's corn field is a field of oats.

This is not, you will see, one of the many peculiarities of British custom: "corn" is the proper generic term for all kinds of grain, and when the precious yellow grain was brought from the New World, it was perfectly natural for Englishmen to name it "Indian corn." The Spanish discoverers had previously named it "maiz," and that word grew into the present "maize," which we sometimes use; but our American ancestors evidently preferred the word "corn" and we have stuck to it.

A RAILROAD man comes next. And we have plenty of good news for him. On December 14 we start a Western railroad serial by Frances Lynde. And then—remember the old *Railroad Man's Magazine*? It won't be long now before it is with us again.

Kingsburg, Calif.

You can thank, or blame, my wife for this letter, because it was she who decided that I should write it. In fact, she makes most of the decisions of this family. If she wasn't the finest little woman, I wouldn't stand for it, but—

Let's see what I can say—

Our acquaintance with your magazine begins not very far back, and it began with one of the most entertaining novelettes I have ever read, and it alone was worth a year's subscription. "Buccaneers of the Air" was the name of it, and I couldn't, to save my neck, have laid that magazine down until the story was finished. I passed it on to friend wife, who wouldn't have heard a dynamite explosion in the next room during the time it took her to read it. We both say it is the finest piece of fiction we have seen in many a long day.

We don't care much for the impossible type of story.

The ARGOSY is a magazine that cannot be criticized to any serious extent. It is too well balanced for that. "Blood on the Snow," just concluded, was a fairly good Western; "The Haunted Yacht Club" is the thing that is holding us spellbound right now and we won't be able to think of much else until the final installment comes along. We can't guess the end of this one.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

11-2

And now let me make a little plea. Being a railroader I would like to see a great thrilling railroad serial coming along and I'm on your subscription for life. I saw in some back copies that you published some dandy railroad short stories, but they were little ones. You have pleased the impossible fans; you have given the Western story consumers all they want; now please give us railroaders something to think over.

Let some other railroad man make his wishes known, please.

MR. AND MRS. C. L. HERBERT.

THIS reader's favorites go back quite a ways:

Louisville, Ky.

I would like to say a few words for ARGOSY. I have been a reader since about 1910, ever since I was about ten years old. Mr. Robert E. Howard's letter interested me very much. I wonder if he remembers, or has, the stories of "Minos of Sardania" and "Polaris of the Snows." They are a little old, but I will always remember them. I like the Fred MacIsaac stories. Tell him to keep writing. I like adventure stories and strange ones, too. Just read an installment of "The Planet of Peril." It's fine!

GEORGE R. BOND.

Looking Ahead!

F. R. BUCKLEY

comes to ARGOSY next week with a rattling good novel of the cow country

The WH Brand

W. WIRT

will be on hand again with a gripping complete novelette of war between the Secret Service and the Detroit underworld

"Draw a Gun!"

KINGSBURY SCOTT,

author of "Paradise Island," gives us another of his fine Great Lakes stories in

"The Peace Offering"

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF NOVEMBER 9th

Your *face* knows it's winter..

And so does your Gillette Blade, for it has extra work to do

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You may not wear the same face in November that you do in May, but count on Gillette Blades to shave you smoothly, swiftly, surely. They keep your face feeling young, and looking it. Gillette Safety Razor Co., Boston, U. S. A.

★ Gillette ★

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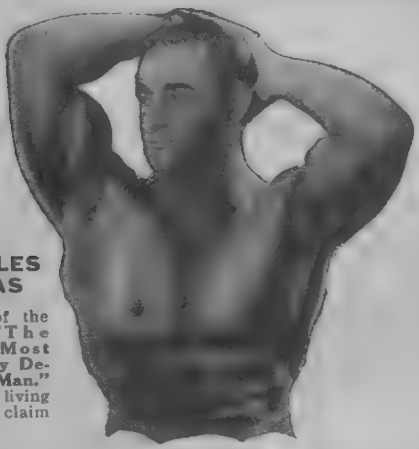

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Statement of the ownership, management, etc., of ARGOSY, published weekly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1929, Required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912.

State of NEW YORK } s.s. :
County of NEW YORK }

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared C. T DIXON, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of ARGOSY, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in Section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations. To wit:

That the names and addresses of the Publisher, Editor, Managing Editor, and Business Manager are:

Publishers—**The Frank A. Munsey Company,** 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Editor—**Archibald H. Bittner,** 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—**C. T. Dixon,** 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

That the Owners are: (If a corporation give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

The Frank A. Munsey Company, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

C. W. H. Corporation, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

William T. Dewart, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:

None.

That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. C. T. DIXON, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1929.

{SEAL}

P. D. SPAGNOLI, Notary Public, Queens County. Term expires March 30, 1930. Certificate filed in New York County. Queens County No. 1856; New York County No. 1146. New York Register No. 0-855.

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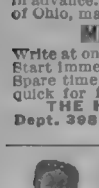

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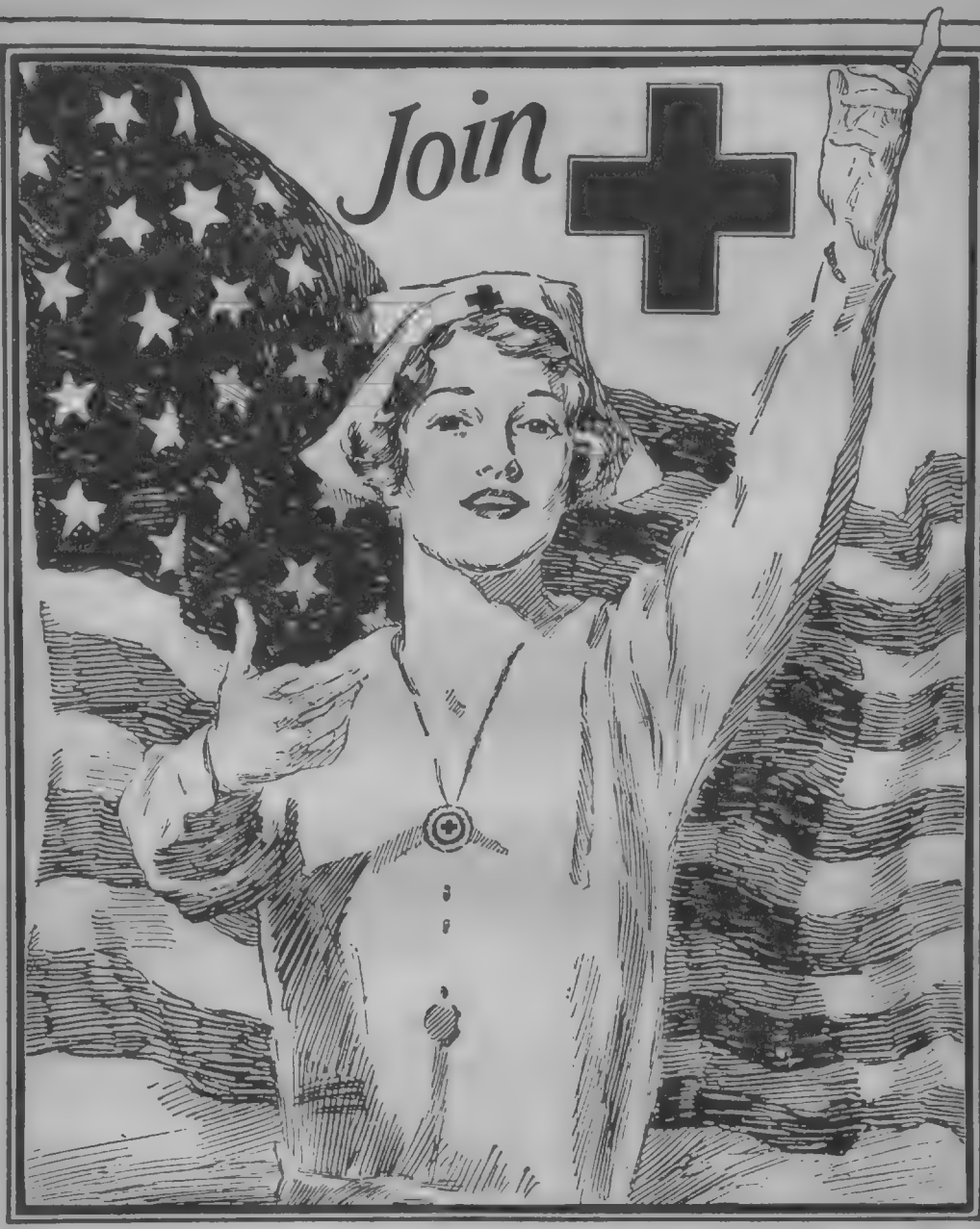

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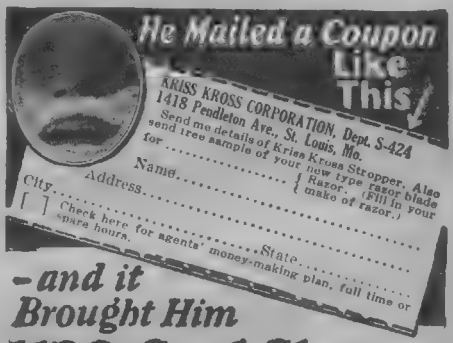
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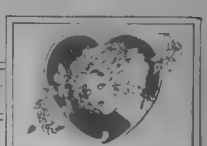


ALL-STORY

The new magazine
Of thrills and heart throbs
Love stories you never forget

Romantic colorful
With here and there a touch of pathos
And golden dreams
Tremulous with ecstasy
Youth at flood tide

In every issue

JOHN FRASER

Internationally recognized graphologist
Analyzes the handwriting of sweethearts
To determine if
They are suited to each other

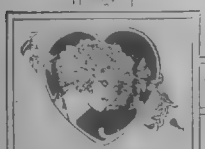
The current issue of ALL-STORY contains
"A China Sea Romance" by H. Thompson Rich
With kidnapping and smugglers
Shipwreck in a hurricane
And a girl who kept the faith

Other tales equally fascinating
By the greatest writers
In the love-story field

ALL-STORY

"Love Stories of the American Girl."

Every other week **20c** ***All news-stands***



FREE RADIO CATALOG

The New SCREEN GRID models

Write for latest catalog just off the press—148-page book offering hundreds of radio bargains—New Humless Screen Grid, A. C., all-electric and battery operated sets—beautiful consoles, accessories, parts and kits—all at wholesale prices. **Complete sets as low as $15.95**

Chicago Salvage Stock Store
509 So. State St., Dept. 126, Chicago

Stop Coughing!

Rexall White Pine and Tar relieves tight congestion quickly. Soothes and clears the throat; brings you blessed relief from that stubborn, hacking cough. Sold only at Rexall Stores. Save with safety at your

Rexall DRUG STORE

SAVE WITH SAFETY Rexall DRUG STORE

There is one near you. You will recognize it by this sign. Liggett's are also Rexall Stores.

Thank you for making it possible for me to own a **21 Jewel~ Santa Fe Special**

Writes Thousands of Our~ Customers

The Nationally Popular Santa Fe Special sent to you for your approval Send No Money with Order ~ Wear 30 Days FREE!

Write for Watch Book and Diamond Book

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You must be pleased when you buy a "Santa Fe Special" Watch. That is why I will send for your approval one of these Standard Watches, guaranteed for a lifetime of satisfactory service, not only by the Santa Fe Watch Company, but by the Great Illinois Watch Factory. They are found in the pockets of men in the service on every railroad in this country. Senators, Congressmen, and Governors keep their official appointments by "Santa Fe Special" time. Army Officers and Privates carried them all through the Greatest War in history—thousands of these splendid watches are in use all over the World. If you want one on my liberal Buy and Pay the Santa Fe Way Plan—you had better write for my Free Watch Book today and make your selection. I will even let you wear the watch 30 days FREE, then sell it to you on a binding money back guarantee, and on easy monthly payments.

JUST OUT!—New "Santa Fe" Watch Book

Send coupon for our New Watch Book—just off the press. All the newest watch case designs in white or green gold, fancy shapes and thin models are shown. Read our easy payment offer. Wear the watch 30 days FREE. Nothing to risk. See the watch before you buy. Write for New Book Today—It's FREE. Select Your Watch NOW.

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Send No Money 11¾ cents a day~ pays for any of these Watches.

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Name.....

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Every Saturday...in every stadium...
SORE THROAT!

Gargle with Listerine when you get home...

HERE, as any doctor will tell you, is a bit of sound wisdom for those who attend late season football games.

Before going, and after returning from them gargle with full strength Listerine. This pleasant little precaution may spare you a nasty siege with a cold or sore throat or their more dangerous complications.

Medical records show that after football games, there is marked increase in the number of cases of colds . . . sore throat . . . influenza and bronchitis.

They are caused by germs in the mouth which get the upper hand when body resistance is lowered by over exposure, change of temperature, emotional disturbances, all of which are coincidental with seeing a football game.

Listerine checks them effectively because, used full strength, it is powerful against germs—kills them by the million.

Even such stubborn organisms as the Staphylococcus Aureus (pus) and Bacillus Typhosus (typhoid) in counts ranging to 200,000,000 are killed by it in 15 seconds, repeated laboratory tests show. Yet Listerine is so safe that it may be used full strength in any body cavity.

Use Listerine systematically during winter weather. It is a pleasant habit, a cleanly habit, and one that may lengthen your life. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

KILLS 200,000,000 GERMS IN 15 SECONDS

YOU CAN NOW Pay Your Bills

AND HAVE MONEY TO SPARE

with a steady Income for the rest of your life—

if you will take care of my business in your locality. No experience needed. Pleasant, easy work, can be handled in spare or full time.

No Investment Needed

I furnish all capital—I set you up in business, advertise you, and do everything to make you my successful and respected partner in your locality. I will make you my partner in my fast growing, established business—but I don't ask you to invest a single penny in merchandise. Everything is furnished to you FREE—just look after the business in your locality and we will split all the money 50-50! Partner may be either man or woman. All I ask is that you have ambition and can devote a few hours each day to distributing my famous products to friends and a list of established customers. High grade food products, teas, coffee, spices, extracts, things people must have to live.

Your Groceries at Wholesale

As my partner I furnish your groceries at wholesale—I do everything to see that my partners get all the advantages of Big Business. Big FREE supply contains over 32 full size packages of highest quality products. Choose all your groceries, at wholesale, from my big list of over 300 home necessities. Quality backed by $25,000.00 Bond.

I Show You An Easy Way to Make $15 a Day Steady Income

LOOK!

$36.47 in an Hour and a Half

Mrs. S. M. Jones, mother of four, made $36.47 first 1½ hours. Working only 2 half days a week made $2000 profit in few months.

$200 in Spare Time

C. C. Miner, Iowa, made $200 in spare time his first 15 days. His first 4 days brought him $74 profit.

"$15 a Day Easy"

Says W. Skiles, Pa., "I have made $15.23 in only 2 hours." In addition to a big steady income he says, "You have given me $1.437 worth of gifts, checks and prizes."

Burned Mortgage on Home

Rev. McMurphy, Alabama, tells how Van brought him from poverty to a mortgage-free home, new car and financial independence.

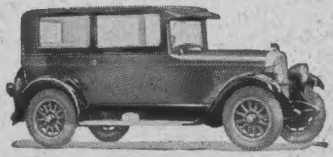
You, too, can be free from money worries for life—send the coupon.

I don't want you to take any chances. I give you a GUARANTEE that is the talk of the entire industry. This is the most amazing guarantee ever made for a steady, year 'round income. I can make this **guarantee** because I know you can do as well as my other partners whose letters are shown on this page.

Besides going 50-50 with my partners on profits, I WILL FURNISH YOUR HOME with hundreds of wonderful premiums, including pianos, living room sets, etc., that I give as premiums. Send coupon at once for my signed GUARANTEE, which protects you against loss and assures you $100.00 a week for full time or $3.00 per hour for spare time work.

SEND COUPON AT ONCE for APPLICATION

I Furnish You Chrysler Coach



I offer every one of my partners a new Chrysler Coach as soon as they come with me. I want my partners to be prosperous and look prosperous to gain respect from everyone in their localities. That's why I will offer you ABSOLUTELY FREE this brand new Chrysler Coach to use in your business. This is no contest! It is yours to keep just as soon as you show me you are in earnest. Send coupon today.

Health-O Quality Products Co.

C. W. VAN DE MARK, Pres. and Gen. Mgr.

Dept. 913-MM Health-O Bldg.

CINCINNATI, OHIO

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FREE FOOD PRODUCTS COUPON

C. W. Van De Mark, Health-O Quality Products Company, Dept. 913-MM, Health-O Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio

Without obligation on my part, send, at once, application for territory and details of partnership offer, free food products.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

The cheer leader—

Camel

CIGARETTES

More genuine pleasure... more hearty cheer... Camel gains on every play. Go into a huddle with yourself and a pack of Camels... and you're all set.

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